

THEORY OF ADAPTATION

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THEORY OF ADAPTATION

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Summary

Hannibal now has his David. Together they explore Europe, and each other. Romance in Paris in the light of darkness.

Notes

We thank CannibalsSong for her proofreading. Thanks to her at least one of us is an native English speaker. We wrote it to keep the Fannibals spirit alive. We enjoy our family and this is our gift to you all, Fannibals.

Enjoy life and carry on Hannibal!

DuchessofYork & Elefant

SABRER LE CHAMPAGNE!

Will woke up when they were landing in Roissy Charles De Gaulle airport. He slid his hand in Hannibal's just for the physical contact and to ensure he was not dreaming. They had to queue a little while to go through customs, then a man with a driver's cap was waiting for them at the arrival gate with a sign written *Dr. Hannibal Lecter* in big character letters. Hannibal went to him and spoke to him in French. The driver diligently took both their suitcases and lead them to the limousine waiting for them in front. When they arrived at the hotel, doorman and butler kept busy around their limousine while Hannibal walked on the red carpet as if he was in conquered territory, imperious before to turn to wait for Will to join him and enter together in the lobby. Will kept looking left and right and admiring the interior of the hotel. *Damn! This is even grander than the Baltimore hotel!* Will thought to himself. Hannibal took his hand and dragged him to the reception desk while he was trying to take all the shiny lobby in memory. "Do you always stay here...when you visit France?" Will asked in a quiet whisper. Hannibal shook his head. "No...not always. I usually stay with my Uncle Robertus and Aunt Murasaki." He paused thoughtfully. "You know, perhaps I should introduce you to them."

Will's eyes widened. Before he could protest, Hannibal turned toward the receptionist and stated his reservation "Certainly Dr. Lecter..." She checked her computer and smiled to them handling the keycards to the porter waiting for them "If you please follow him to your suite, Sirs...". Will kept silent in the lift and followed Hannibal and the porter. It was not a room but an incredibly luxurious apartment with a piano and an amazing view of the Eiffel tower. Will once again gaped in awe. *Wait till I tell Beverly about this!* Will was already wondering how to describe the place to his friend without sounding like he was bragging. He didn't care too much for the empire style furniture, but fresh flowers everywhere made the place look like a garden. Hannibal, on the other hand, was happy. For the first time in years, he felt overjoyed. Will with him in luxury comfort, and they had a whole three weeks to spend together. Will went to the table where stood a complimentary sumptuous fruit basket and a Krug champagne bottle in a bucket with two shiny crystal flutes. "Wow! Champagne too? Did you like....donate to their building fund or something? I mean, I know you're a distinguished patron of the Baltimore Opera and all..."

Hannibal playfully flicked Will's ear. "Hush, you silly puppy. Now..." He cunningly slipped his hands under Will's jacket. "...shall we try the hot tub, my love?" The porter was still standing nearby the door and dropped his head before to leave quickly and as discreetly as possible. Will giggled. "I think the porter was scandalized by what you just said." Hannibal smiled. "No matter. Now, you haven't answered my question..." Will kissed Hannibal instead of answering him. They kissed while peeling each other's clothes off until they reached the bathroom. Once in the bathroom, Hannibal finally let go of Will and began to ready the bath. He added in the bath salts and scented bath foam. Will on the other hand gingerly ran his hands on the decorated walls. "A mirror just by the tub? So you can watch

yourself in the bath?” “No, so that WE can watch ourselves in the bath. And don’t forget the lovely view of the Eiffel Tower too”. Hannibal then motioned Will to get into the tub and he followed after. Like the gentleman he is, Hannibal took Will’s hand and helped him climb into the tub. Will just let himself be led; growing up poor in Louisiana, he had never had a chance to experience such luxury. Not that he desired or longed for it. It was just something other people had. As he leaned into Hannibal’s chest, Will sighed. “This...is the life....” Hannibal wrapped his arms around his lover, resting his chin on Will’s shoulders. “You, my dear, are my life...” Hannibal kissed his neck, shoulders and Will leaned in Hannibal’s embrace, closing his eyes and savoring the moment. Hannibal took his time enjoying the pleasure he was giving to Will, and the thrills he felt against his chest.

In the tub, Will’s mind began to wander. As if meditating, he let all the worries and frustrations with his life and his job wash away: unsolved cases, unmarked essays, Jack’s temper, the thought of Hannibal being the Ripper, worrying about his dogs...Will kept breathing in and out, while Hannibal covered him with kisses and caresses. “Stay with me, Will...I want you here, now, with me...” Will sighed and pushed himself against Hannibal’s body and got the desired answer, feeling Hannibal already hard against his back. “Oh, I am here alright, Hannibal...and I want you right now, but I want you on all fours for me today...let me give you a good souvenir of our first night in Paris.” Hannibal’s pulse increased a little, in anticipation. “Oh Will! I thought you’d never ask....what took you so long?” “Well, our situation was not exactly perfect from the start. You being a married man, me being a free electron...” “And now?...” “Now, I can see that we are both equally trapped in a story that is bigger than us. Like two electrons gravitating around a powerful attractive center, forced together, unable and unwilling to escape...” Hannibal sucked a hickey on Will’s neck, just the joint of his shoulder. “If this is how you feel, then let me express my thoughts. Will Graham, you accepted my being...regardless of my flaws and faults. You didn’t try to extinguish my darkness. Instead, you embraced and made it into your own sanctuary. You...” Will turned around and kissed Hannibal hard. “Do you know, every time you try to sound like you’re reciting a poem or some shit it’s such a turn-on!” Will kissed Hannibal again and felt his hand on his cock, pleasing him with a very light touch “Then give it to me...” “Let’s go to the bed...”

They were out and on the bed dripping water all over with insouciance and fell heavily on the bed together entwined and still kissing. Will coaxed Hannibal under him and traced his way down his chest with wet kisses and light bites, encouraged by Hannibal’s soft moans and the sight of him lost in pleasure already arching his back in anticipation. Hannibal’s body jerked, his head thrown back as Will’s tongue licked his inner thigh. Hannibal’s fully hard cock was throbbing against his belly and Will’s curls. Will deliberately ignored it and concentrated on kissing and stroking his inner thighs. He slid his hand to enjoy the full weight of his balls and played with them as Hannibal liked to do with his. The result was as expected, Hannibal spread his legs and pushed his hips forward. Will read it right as Hannibal giving him complete permission over his body. It was a rare gift; Will knew Hannibal never trusted any past lover to have him, the way he was giving himself to Will. Eyes still on Hannibal, Will inched back and crawled off the bed. He quickly picked his way through their bags, searching

for lubricant. “Left pocket, Will” Hannibal’s voice sounded strained. Will smiled and tore open the zip. Grabbing the tube, he crawled back onto the bed and put a show coating his fingers while Hannibal was watching him, mouth slightly open and licking his lower lip. Will bent on Hannibal’s mouth while his finger was circling his entrance.

He felt Hannibal’s body tensing under him “ Are you ok, Hannibal?” “Oh, yes! I have waited for this long enough, Will. Do not...ever stop...” Hannibal’s voice sounded broken like he was about to cry. Will was a little worried. “Hanni?” He rested his forehead against Hannibal’s. Hannibal reached up, caressing the back of Will’s neck. “Take me, Will. My heart, my soul, my body...make me yours as you are mine.” Will pushed one finger inside, Hannibal was tight but even as he penetrated him he felt him relaxed his muscles there to allow him in. It was empowering to be the one taking possession in this way. And soon Will was playing with his finger sliding in and out of Hannibal intimacy, amazed at how easy it was to make him beg. Will knew Hannibal wasn’t one to beg and plead. Yet, here and now, he was giving Will full control, total surrender. “Hanni, tell me if it’s too much.” “My...dear...Will....I can never get enough of you...” Hannibal whispered harshly, his hands clutching onto Will’s upper arms. Will nodded, gently kissing Hannibal’s neck and shoulders. “I never knew I wanted you like this so much...” Will murmurs against his ear panting. He added another finger with ease and enjoyed the instant tensing of Hannibal’s body in response; immediately followed by the relaxing of the muscles and moaning. “You are mine, Hannibal...” Will said, his own voice now strained with emotion.

“Prove it, my Dear” Hannibal smirked, his breath shallow. “Oh no! You will not get it so easily...” Will pushed inside to find his prostate and Hannibal jerked with a little surprise yelping. “I can play you as well as you do...” Will smiled into his neck. Now stroking his prostate every time his fingers slid in “How does it make you feel, doctor?” Hannibal groaned. “You....enjoy...torturing me....” Will chuckled. “Yes, I do”. Hannibal lost it completely with the next expert fingers moving in and out. Will truly enjoyed seeing Hannibal unable to speak anymore, only reduced to pleasurable sensations under him. Will did add a third finger just to make sure not to hurt Hannibal when he will penetrate him, but with no more reaction from Hannibal’s part. “Please...Will, please...” Will was so hard, he was afraid to come right away when he pushed his way through the tight muscle still guarding Hannibal’s entrance. He groaned loudly with the effort, trying hard to keep control of himself. With three pushes, he was inside to the tilt and waited for Hannibal to relax again. Hannibal was painfully tight around him and it helped keep the boiling in his lower belly at bay for the moment. “Move! Give me more...” Hannibal whispered. While they rocked back and forth, Hannibal’s mind recalled the vigorous violins of the third movement of *L’estate* from Vivaldi’s *Le Quattro Stagioni* . Never had Hannibal felt such passion; Will seemed to have penetrated the very core of his soul. None of them existed anymore, they both disappeared in the pleasure, given and received, without knowing on which side they were.

Drifting on sensation, hooked to each other, desperate not to get lost and unwilling to find their way again to the reality of the world. When they came together, Will felt as if all his life force had been sucked out from his body. Hannibal's firm grip on Will's arms slowly relaxed together with his breathing. "It's strange...sometimes, I don't know if it's mine or your pleasure that I feel in my core..." Will murmured in Hannibal's neck. Will felt Hannibal's all sweaty under him and his arm around his waist, stopping him from leaving him for now. "When the two find each other, there is an unspoken understanding of one another, that they feel unified and would lie with each other in unity and would know no greater joy..." Hannibal recited. "Are you citing Plato as a response?" "...Yeah, it is..." Will didn't have anything to add. They stayed like this in silence for a while, and Will moved aside when he felt himself falling to sleep. The last image printed in his retina was the night falling on the illuminated Eiffel tower through the balcony door of their suite.

DÎNER AUX CHANDELLES

When he woke up two hours later, the Eiffel tower was still there, so it wasn't just a dream. Hannibal wasn't in the bed anymore though and Will listened to track him somewhere in the suite. He heard water running and knew he was in the shower. He thought for a second to join him there but was caught again by the view. He smiled to himself, feeling a little like Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*, but the feeling was balanced by the power he felt while taking possession of Hannibal's body. Hannibal always treated them like they were equals, and like people born in money, he didn't care about who paid what. It was just a mean to experience pleasant moments together. For Will, it was still very particular to have all that luxury around, more because he wasn't sure how to act with people being so submissive around them. But he could get used to it very easily, borrowing Hannibal's attitude until he made it his own.

Will stretched out in the enormous bed, then lifted himself up. He smiled seeing as Hannibal had emptied their pockets and phones, wallets and other things were left on the bedside table. He remembered teasing Beverly, and so Will reached for his phone. He clicked the video icon and began to move it around the room. By then, he was already out of bed, naked with his phone in his hand. Will moved from one end of the suite to the other. Then he finally walked up to the balcony and focused on the Eiffel Tower. He ended the video and sent it to Beverly. Ten minutes later, a message came back mixed with cheers and curse words. "OMG! Graham, I hate you! I so fucking hate you! But the view is beautiful. You sure your Sugar Daddy doesn't have an equally hot brother for me?" Will laughed at the message. Hannibal came out of the bathroom with a towel around his hips and brushing his hair to dry them with another. "Should I be jealous that someone has stolen your attention?" Hannibal mused. "Oh no, Mister! When you look THAT good, you sure have my full attention..."

Will walked up to him and stole a kiss before playfully pulling the towel off Hannibal's hips. Hannibal let out a shout but then shook his head as Will laughed and ran into the bathroom with the damp towel. "Let's get dressed for dinner, and then we can have a romantic walk in Paris, Love!" he heard Hannibal say behind him. Hannibal would never tolerate such behavior, but he always made an exception for his beloved Will. As Will decided to shower, leaving the door open on purpose, Hannibal smirked. He got busy taking care of hanging their clothes and putting underwears in the drawers. When he was satisfied, he considered what was suitable for the Alain Ducasse Haute Cuisine restaurant downstairs. Of course, he didn't choose this hotel for the Eiffel Tower view, and he was anticipating the experience of sharing that refined moment with Will. A familiar scent reached his nose causing Hannibal to turn around. There was Will, towel around his hips, his curls wet...and his face clean shaven. Will realized Hannibal noticed his face, and he blushed deeply. "I know...I probably look twelve..but I....I just wanted a new look...you know, new beginning and all". Hannibal couldn't help himself, he pulled Will close and kissed him soundly.

The dinner was very pleasant and Hannibal made sure Will drank enough to relax in the luxury environment and enjoy the food as well as he did. When they finished the dessert, Hannibal kept looking at Will with an enigmatic smile. "What?" Will said. "I was thinking of the terrible year I spent here in Paris when I arrived from the orphanage, and how everything looked strange and otherworldly to me. How difficult it was for me to adapt. And

you, you already act all natural. You are amazing, Will Graham.” Will blushed and smiled in his eyes, flirting a little “So easy because I use you as a buffer. Fake it until you make it, was never difficult for me. I just plug myself into your mind and deliver a show of what the other would do in the situation. You can call it a defense mechanism. A way to hide my true self to adapt my ever-changing environment when I was a kid following my dad from one naval worship to another.” “But I see you, Will. And it is not a reflection of myself...” “No, it’s not. It’s mainly because both our souls resonate on the same harmonics. I am aware of my darkness now, like never before. I am not hiding from myself anymore, and this is mainly thanks to you, Hannibal. Loving you despite myself was a way to love myself as well.” “I love you too, Will.” Hannibal said, suddenly all too serious for Will’s playful mood. “Then, show me Paris and give me the romantic vibe of its nights....” Hannibal and Will left the restaurant about an hour later. The doorman called a cab for them and they both entered.

In the cab, Will grinned causing Hannibal to raise his eyebrows in question. “No, nothing...just...once my car broke down and I was like waving my hands out like an idiot but none of the cabs stopped. And now...” Hannibal put his arms around Will. “I suppose that’s the privilege of having a...Sugar Daddy..” Will jabbed his elbow against Hannibal’s abdomen, but without much force. “You’ve been reading my text messages again!” “My dear Will, I may have eavesdropped when you made a quick phone call to Beverly from the hotel...” The cab eventually arrived at the place Hannibal requested, which was the Boulevard St-Michel, nearby the Seine. Ever the gentleman, Hannibal stepped out of the cab and held his hand out to Will. Will laughed, stating that he wasn’t a woman and that he could get out of the cab without help. “Indulge me, Beloved...just for tonight.” Hannibal insisted as he walked the path with Will on his arm. Some booksellers were still open at this late hours for tourists, and they walked among them hand in hand. Nobody gave them any special attention, and it was serene after the physical tiredness and the emotions. Hannibal bought an old book of John Perse poetry in French. Will saw him under a different light, refined and cultivated, Paris gave this to him in his youth. Arts was not for the gallery, it was part of what rescued him from the wild madness that threatened to swallow him when he arrived raw and savage from the orphanage. Something that could resonate with the extreme sensibility crushed deep down to be protected from the violence of the world.

Once the book was purchased, they continued walking. “Tell me about your days in Paris. You said you spent quite a bit of your youth here.” Will asked softly, leaning into Hannibal’s arm. They went down to walk on the quay. The cathedral Notre Dame stood immutable on the horizon and the details of his architecture highlighted by the lighting. The lights of a riverboat passing by reflected on the water at their feet. The water, with its dark reflection, made Will think about his days in Louisiana. It was at similar docks that Will used to help his father fix boats. He also picked up the skill for it. “Penny for your thoughts, my Love” Hannibal’s voice in his ear made Will shiver a little. “Just thinking about home...my old hometown...in Louisiana. Nothing fancy like this, but the usual boat docks. Fishing boats mostly.” Hannibal smiled. “You enjoyed the time spent with your father, even if it was working with him.” Will’s shy glance said it all. “We...we moved around a lot, depending on where dad could find work. But yeah, times with dad were the best. He taught me how to fish too, and make my own lures. I grew up poor, but I don’t resent that. I think...I think what I learned from dad, you know...survival skills and all...I think that kinda made me who I am today.”

Wanting to share his own history with Will, Hannibal spoke. "I was reborn here when I came in Paris. My uncle and my aunt were caring and patient with the little beast that I was then. They put me in the best school money could buy, I had home tutors at the beginning...like I had home with my parents in another life. I was too rough to be among my peers, but eventually, I felt safe enough to be freed among others at school. And I was...hungry! Oh, god I was so hungry to learn. I read everything I could put my hands on. The library of my uncle was far from enough and the public library was a kind of safe haven where my imagination could be sated." His hand squeezed slightly Will's as he faced him and leaned in for a kiss. Will indulged him and felt unguarded tenderness. He wanted to respond to it and slowly put his arms around Hannibal's neck to kiss him back properly, saying with a kiss all that cannot be said with words. A light breeze filtered through the air, the chill made Will pull Hannibal closer. They look at each other and smiled before resuming their walk. Hannibal told Will how he went to the medical school at an early age, much a little prodigy among the other students. He also mentioned again the rage that animated him until he was old enough to travel back to Lithuania; he then sought after and killed those who were responsible for Misha's death, and how he tracked them back to France to finish them all.

Will saw the unshed tears in Hannibal's eyes when he mentioned Misha. He then understood a little more about why Hannibal became the man he is today. It wasn't just his sister's death, but the culmination of all the events before and after. Rudeness was not just a pet peeve for Hannibal, it was almost sacrilege. Hannibal simply wanted to turn something ugly into something beautiful. Art and beauty saved him, and in a way, changing the rude into beautiful scenes was a way to save them. The tragedy is not to die but to be wasted, he grinned. He felt Hannibal's arm slid in his back and found himself back in his arms, their lips brushing lightly "Would you come with me to visit my uncle and my aunt tomorrow?" "Uh, uh...are we already at this stage?" he told Hannibal mockingly with a smirk. "I think we passed that already and it is not a necessity for us. We don't need the approval of anyone. I only think that meeting them could give you an understanding of some of my past..." Hannibal held Will's hands and kissed him silent. "Will, this is not about gaining approval. I wish for you to meet my family, the little family that I have left. I have, after all, met your four-legged children." "Don't know if your parents would like the comparison, but yes I will accompany you tomorrow to meet them." They kissed again and walk up the paved stairs to cross the small bridge to the cathedral Notre Dame. It was much more impressive from close with its stone lace rosette. They walked through the streets of the Ile de la Cité enwrapped in a complicit silence and crossed another bridge. When they reached Pompidou center the crowd was denser and Will was leaning against Hannibal's shoulder sleepy. Hannibal took him to the nearby cabs station and gave their hotel address in French to the driver. Will was already asleep against Hannibal and the driver look at them in the mirror only to meet Hannibal's threatening gaze and kept then his nose on the wheel till they reached their destination.

LA VIE DE CHÂTEAU

When Will woke up there was a table set with a gargantuan breakfast nearby the open door of the little balcony with sunbeams reaching to the flowers arrangement on one side. He stretched himself with a satisfied groan. Hannibal was reading, already dressed on the couch, perfectly straight and perfectly in keeping with this luxurious environment. He turned his head and smiled to him when he heard him "Welcome back to the world of the living, Will! Did you sleep well?" "Like a charm..." Will's voice still hoarse from sleep. "I am hungry and what I see is nice." "I took the freedom to order while you were still sleeping. Ready when you are." "Let me go to the bathroom first and I'll join you!" Breakfast was joyful and Will tried everything on the table even if normally he would just have coffee for breakfast. They laughed about little nothings and mood was very light. When they finished, Hannibal put a nice dark blue suit with a white shirt on the bed for Will. Then he went back to the couch to resume his reading. Will still wanted more attention and went to him when he left the table. He pushed his book and sat on his lap "Sure you don't want to dress me up, doctor?.." he said flirtatiously.

Hannibal let him invade his space with a visible pleasure. "Are you asking me to dress you up or to undress you?..." He kissed him chastely on the mouth to tease him further. "Why not both, doctor..." Will was already undoing Hannibal's tie and followed licking and putting small kisses in the crook of his neck. "Oh, Will..." Will took all his time unbuttoning his shirt, sliding his hands on Hannibal's shoulders, collar, sliding down to caress his hairy chest and slightly pinch his nipples. Hannibal was unmoving, submitting to Will's torturous foreplay, already tense in anticipation and half hard against Will's thigh. Will felt empowered by the excitation he sensed through Hannibal's body under him. His hands worked his belt quickly and he pulled his pants and boxer down over his hips. Hannibal arched himself against the couch to help him. Will kneeled between Hannibal's legs and looked up to meet his gaze, black and lustfull. Hannibal's cock was now fully hard. He stroke the under ridge with his finger teasingly before to grip the base more tightly and brought his open mouth to the dripping head still looking in Hannibal's eyes. He put his wet mouth against the slit unmoving.

Hannibal breathed in hard and jerked his head back while he slowly slid his tongue there and took the head in the warm of his mouth. Out and again, playing him like an accomplished musician, soon he got him to moan without interruption. He took him deeper, licking and sucking him without mercy until he knew he was on the cliff. Then he got up and abandoned him undone and panting. "Will..." Hannibal almost screamed suddenly cold and exposed. "Coming back right away..." Will went to the nightstand and took the lube before coming back to his lover. Hannibal was slightly shaking, his cock throbbing against his belly, his head on the back of the couch. Will bent over him and kissed him deeply while his hand stroked his hardness lightly "Will..." "I like to have you like this..." Will spurred in his ear. "You are so beautifully cruel, Will." Will pulled his pants and boxer away before to turn Hannibal on the couch and kneeled down crawling between his legs. He put a show coating his fingers while Hannibal licked his lips watching him with a feverish gaze. Will spread his legs and pushed up his thighs as he bent again over him to take his mouth. Will felt Hannibal instinctively tensed at the contact of his finger along his perineum. His finger gently circled

his hole to relax the muscle there. When Hannibal's body relaxed under his touch, he pushed inside to the first knuckle. "Will, I don't need you to be so gentle..." Hannibal groaned, his voice strained as he tried not to cum too soon.

Hannibal looked at Will and saw a familiar pained expression. Will too was holding back, wanting to make this last longer. Both of them were breathing erratically now, lust and ecstasy overwhelming their senses. As Will added more fingers into Hannibal, spreading him wider, all Hannibal could think of was the building up of the Cadenza from the first movement of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E Minor. When Will finally entered him, Hannibal wanted to scream. His self-control tearing apart at the seams, and his lungs felt like they were being squeezed from the inside. Will too was panting hard as he kept mumbling "want you", "god, Hanni", "so good". As they reached their climax, the Cadenza in Hannibal's mind burst into the Coda and eventually ended with a literal bang. Will's eyes widened, his near black pupils darting around for the source of the noise. Hannibal himself was frantically wondering where the sound came from. Eventually, Will slowly pulled out of Hannibal. When Hannibal tried to move, he felt his balance on the couch a little lopsided. Slowly, he too rose up with Will and then they glanced back at the couch. "I think we broke it." Will's worried voice blurted out, staring back at the couch, which had sunk to the right. Hannibal burst into laughter. "Oh my! I believe we have!" Will elbowed Hannibal who continued to laugh. "It's not funny, Hannibal! We broke a freakingly expensive couch...in a freakingly expensive hotel room!"

"The hotel belongs to my family, so I don't think it will be a problem, Will. Relax..." "What?!..." "It's not exactly true, my family is the main shareholder of the company which owned this hotel, but still...not a problem." Will looked upset, running his fingers through his curls. "Still....come on, Hanni! We still broke that thing. The manager might throw us out...you know, for breaking furniture!" Hannibal caressed Will's cheek. "My dear, as I told you...my family owns a large share in this hotel. They won't throw us out. They can't risk losing our business..." Will sighed heavily. "Fine...whatever. But yeah, it was kinda funny..." his shy smile peeking out, making Hannibal want to tussle those lovely chocolate curls. Realising it was useless to resist, Hannibal ran his fingers through Will's hair. "Perhaps, we should adjourn to the bathroom..." Will kissed away the rest of Hannibal's sentence. "Yeah, let's have shower sex!" Will chuckled, dragging Hannibal along with him. The shower cabin behind its glass door was as big as a small office and they had plenty of room under the cascade of water. But both were exhausted and apart from washing and caressing each other between kisses, the sex shower was pretty chaste. Will remembered himself that they still have two days in Paris....

After the sensual shower, they slept for two hours; then they finally got dressed to conquer Paris. Outside the hotel entrance, Will turned to his lover and smiled. "Where are you taking me now, Hanni? Or is this some secret place...hidden underground?" "Nothing so mysterious, my love. If you do wish to immerse yourself in secret rooms and tunnels, then I shall have to take you to my home back in Lithuania. Sadly, the manor is in ruins now, a far cry from its once glorious state." Will leaned into Hannibal. "I'm still nervous about meeting your uncle and aunt, but...I think I'll try not to be so socially awkward." "Will, don't change yourself just to please others. I would rather you act your natural self. I don't need their approval and neither do you." Hannibal assured Will, kissing a protest from his lips. They got in the taxi and Hannibal instructed the driver in French, Will picked up the words "sacré coeur". It

sounded romantic, but everything was nowadays with Hannibal. Will tried to reason himself bringing up in his mind that Hannibal was a cannibal serial killer, with no result. He was still looking at his lover with the face of a besotted schoolboy. He blushed thinking of himself like this and Hannibal gave him an inquiry look. Will smiled back but didn't give him an answer. Still playing flirtatious but he was amazed at how their relationship evolved. Before Hannibal, Will never imagined being in such a stable relationship. He had always preferred to go to the ground to stay in his comfort zone. Ignoring he wanted to live and not only to survive. Now Hannibal was taking him away from his comfort zone in so many ways, and he was feeling alive and wanted more.

VOYAGE DE MA JEUNESSE

Will looked out the window, the surroundings were all so new to him. He had only ever imagined Paris, from what he'd read or seen in photographs and on television. Yet, here and now, with Hannibal, it all seemed surreal. *Maybe one day I'll show Hanni Louisiana..* Will thought to himself. The taxi left them on a paved square with a stunning view of Paris. Hannibal walked to the side of the parvis to admire it, reaching out for Will's hand. Will felt truly like a tourist, staring at every corner and every structure while Hannibal gave him a private tour. Will's empathy allowed him to see Paris thru Hannibal's eyes, and feel Hannibal's memories as well. A kind of childhood blossoming, a rare exotic flower transplanted to a new universe, still wild, still poisoning, but admired and taken care of. Will was meeting Hannibal as a teenager in his mind and it was pleasant and energizing.

Hannibal then paused in front of a grand facade. "La Basilique du Sacré Coeur, my dearest. One of the many buildings I've sketched from memory. The inspiration for Sacré Cœur's design originated on 4 September 1870, the day of the proclamation of the Third Republic..." Will looked up at the archways and the two equestrian statues on either side. The building was massive and not particularly esthetic from outside. The most interesting was the void space in front of it, a large paved place with the opening on the sky over Paris. The feeling of space was something rare in Paris. Maybe Will felt a little of that walking last night along the quays of the Seine, but the river was embedded in stone walls all along, so it fell short of the breathing opening he had here now. Suddenly Will realized that he was missing the great outdoors of Wolf Trap. He'd spent too much time at work, or at crime scenes. Wolf Trap had always been a kind of sanctuary; the endless paths of dirt, the smell of grass, the nearby river where he fished. Hannibal pulled him closer in his arms and spurred in his ear "Where are you, Will?" "I...oh, sorry...just...this is all so beautiful, Hanni. It reminds me of what I miss back in Wolf Trap. I guess...I guess I'm glad we took this vacation. All those crime scenes...the ugliness...made me forget myself."

Hannibal tightened his arms around him and kissed his temple "Beloved, live now, here with me. I want you in my life forever but I only know what we have now. I never imagined I will revisit the places of my teenage years with someone I could really love. The ghost of my loneliness still here in the shadows, but you bring sunshine to every corner of my memory palace." Will leaned in Hannibal's embrace, eyes closed. He listened to the beat of their hearts in unison, felt warm and safe. There was nowhere where he would rather be. Wolf Trap, Paris, Florence or Mars were all fine as long as Hannibal was with him, that was all he knew now. *Maybe someday we both could leave Jack and all that mess behind* Will wondered. They stayed like this a few minutes, and for eternity. Then Hannibal broke the embrace and took Will's hand to lead him towards the entrance of the Basilica. "I didn't come here for many years, except in my mind palace, and I wonder if it would still give me the same awe. In any case, I want to share it with you." Will nodded, glancing at the travertine stone. Hannibal then continued, "The basilica complex includes a garden for meditation, with

a fountain. The top of the dome is opened to tourists. From there you have a spectacular panoramic view of the city of Paris.” When they entered the building the Christ in glory at the end of the perspective was welcoming them with open arms.

The inside of the Basilica was much more interesting than what could be seen outside. History is always present in Europe, with centuries weighting on every view of the cities and their buildings, with layers and layers of stories. It’s even more oppressive when you are an empath and you can literally hear the stones speaking to you of the people who worked here, lived and dreamed before to disappear. Nevertheless, Will didn’t feel the oppressive so much here because of the light entering thru a well of light and the high stained glasses. Will was not a believer, however, he felt a sense of serenity here. And he sensed he was sharing it with Hannibal. Hannibal was looking at him, reading him as a book with a fond smile, feeling Will walking through his mind palace. Beauty and serenity was all he could feel now with Will striding their shared space. They explored the different sections and their art pieces for two hours and climbed up a narrow stone staircase to the top among a cohort of Japanese tourists. Good thing they were not claustrophobic but Will needed to be close to Hannibal to keep his mind closed in the midst of so many people. It was easier now that he had acknowledged his own dark side, but still...

At the top, there was a small balcony of stone above the nef and the view was stunning. They had Paris at their feet literally. Will could see the city, the streets, the rooftops of the surrounding buildings. “Wow!” His voice in awe. Hannibal wrapped his arms around his beloved. “Yes, Will. A truly magnificent view.” Will realized that Hannibal was looking at him and smiled shyly. “To see you here, admiring what belongs to me already and making it yours as well, in appreciation, is pure joy for me” Hannibal spoke into his ear following with a kiss. Will melted into the kiss. All that he felt now was Hannibal’s arms and warm lips. Nothing else mattered, nothing else existed for now. But reality struck under the form of a cohort of Japanese tourists politely waiting for them to move on around the balcony. When they got down into the church again they didn’t need to speak to know that they only wanted to flee the crowd. Hannibal took Will by the hand and lead him through small paved streets and stairs to the large and somehow romantic Montmartre cemetery. As they drew closer to the next destination, Will realized where they were. He chuckled. “Seriously? A cemetery? Hanni!” Hannibal tugged Will closer and nipped his jaw. “Beloved, it’s not what you think. Just follow me.” Will’s grin didn’t fade as he walked beside Hannibal. It looked a lot like the cemeteries he remembered from New Orleans, and for a reason, he thought as the folks who are buried there were fleeing tyranny from here.

Hannibal motioned Will to walk ahead. Will glanced around the place, looking at the variously shaped tombstones. “This should be creepy. But coming from you, it’s almost romantic” Will’s voice was laced with laughter. Small paved alleys with street signs and Hannibal knew his way as he dragged Will from one grave to another, visiting and paying respect to the geniuses who repose here in simple grave or imposing family vault : Hector

Berlioz, Stendhal, Emile Zola, Heinrich Heine, etc For a brief second, Will was almost certain that maybe Hannibal was going to end his life here and now. And Will would be conveniently buried here where no one would find him. As if reading his thoughts, Hannibal rubbed his thumb on Will's knuckles. "I would not dispose of you here, so crudely. If at all I take your life Will, I would make sure I die with you..." "I want to live a life with you, Hanni before to die..." "I never thought of living before you, Will. But when you will be gone, I will feel your silence like a draft." Will wanted to scream and cry out at the same time. He also wanted to hit Hannibal. "I would NEVER leave you!" He hissed angrily, looking away from his lover. Hannibal realized Will misunderstood his words, gently turned Will's chin towards him. "I know beloved, and I know that my life is irremediably attached to yours. Before, the thought that my life could end at any moment frees me to fully appreciate the beauty, and art, and horror of everything this world has to offer. Now, I know that leaving that world with you when the time will come for us to depart, will only be a change of decor as my soul and yours are so entwined."

Will sighed. Hannibal's words cut through his core. It hurt, but at the same time, it was a beautiful declaration of love. *How did I get this lucky...to find someone like him?* Will thought over and over in his mind. "When I was young and cocky, I often walked in those alleys to walk among geniuses like me, I thought. But it was a lonely path, not to share flesh, but to share a soul. Will, I love you so much that it's scaring me..." Hannibal's voice was suddenly hoarse, and Will instinctively reacted by taking him in his arms. "Shh, shh, Hanni! Let me hold you. I love you, and you know you will have me in this world till my last breath. Calm down, I am not sure that walking in your teenaged path was the best idea if it put you back in his mind." Hannibal stopped the tears that were threatening to roll down his cheek with the back of his hand. "True, I was very wild at that time, and my mind considering ending my life as a valid solution to my problem when I haunted this place feeling like a lost soul. But then, I discovered that the truth of me wanted not only to survive but to thrive. My difference was what makes me feel alive, and I embraced it." Will held his lover, feeling his anxiety and pain. "Hanni, I want you to know that...no matter what happens, I will never leave you. I...I was terrified when I first found out about you, about you being...who you are...but then..." Will sighed, rubbing his cheek against Hannibal's. "...then it didn't matter. I wouldn't have you any other way. Ripper or not, you're my reason for living I guess...the only damned thing that makes sense." They kissed slowly, deeply and for a long time. It was a reassurance to be alive among the dead. But also, the realization that they couldn't exist apart from the other.

After that, they walked hand in hand in the streets of Paris. Strolling among the living was no different from strolling among the dead. Only they existed as a strange mythological entity. They were seated at a coffee terrace on a large boulevard when Hannibal told Will it was time to go back to the hotel to change before meeting with his uncle and aunt for dinner. Will grinned, "Guess I'm kinda meeting-the-parents....maybe they'll ask me what my intentions are towards you..and if I plan to make an honest man out of you..." Hannibal rolled his eyes. "If you may recall, darling...I was a rather honest man..before you came into my life and tempted me to sin.." Will playfully kicked Hannibal under the table. "Yeah, sure! YOU were

the one who couldn't wait to get your tongue down my throat!" Hannibal tried not to laugh. "You still seduced a married man..." "Hanni, you were NEVER really honest!" Will and Hannibal shared a laugh.

When they were in the taxi driving them to Hannibal's parents, Will felt a little nervous. Even if he was joking about, he apprehended how he will be received. To make things worst, Hannibal told him "We are nearly there...see that building, it's where Bedelia's parents are living. Her father is a professor of cardiology, and he was my mentor for a while. He gave me my first internship when most were laughing at me because of my young age." Will tensed, and Hannibal took in hands in his "This is my past, beloved. You are all the rest. Everything will be fine, they are not common people, they will love you because I love you." He deposited a chaste kiss on Will's forehead and followed in French to the driver to tell him where to leave them.

SCENE DE MON ENFANCE

The buildings on Avenue Victor Hugo had nothing to envy to the plush style of those of Boulevard Haussmann. Power and money engraved in stones that were telling the family's fortunes of those living here to those passing by. Hannibal went to the intercom and exchanged a few words for the heavy metal door to open with a sudden click. Inside the luxury decor wasn't a surprise, but the modernity of security system and the lift that took them to the last floor was a contrast with the rest. When they exited the lift, a large wooden door was already open to welcome them, and the maid took their coats before to lead them to the "grand salon". The apartment was brightly lighted and big masters painting were everywhere on the walls. The luxury French style of the furniture was mixed from place to place with Japanese artifacts and bonsais. The effect was pleasant and exotic. Will followed Hannibal through the hall and felt his warmth as he bent over an old man seated in an armchair with a plaid on his lap. He kissed him reverently on both cheeks "Uncle, it's good to see you." Then he went to the frail Japanese woman standing at his side "Aunt, you look good" and he kissed her the same way with the same fond smile on his face. Will stood there and Hannibal came to him to take him by the arm "Aunt Murasaki, Uncle Robert...this is my Will...my life.." Will shivered, trying to calm his frantic breathing.

The Japanese lady blinked and tilted her head slightly, her dark eyes fixed on Will. She then greeted Will. "Hello Will. Welcome to our home. Please make yourself comfortable..." Her words were interrupted by the sound of someone clearing his throat. Everyone turned towards Robert Lecter. "I...suppose he is the reason your marriage failed.." The words hit Will hard. *Shit! He thinks I'm a homewrecker!* Will thought, as he swallowed. Hannibal frowned. "Uncle, please! My marriage was a farce from the very beginning.." "Hannibal" Murasaki's hand touched Hannibal's shoulder gently. "...please, Hannibal...your uncle has not been too well lately. Do not upset him." Robert looked at Hannibal straight in the eyes "My boy, you are still a wild beast, but I wouldn't love you any other way. I needed to see for myself how your relationship was with this man." He looked at Will "Will, sorry for that. I needed to be sure of what Hannibal was feeling for you. I must say, you are the first person that he ever brought home to present to us. Not that he ever asked for approval, mind you..." Robert gave his hand to Will to shake. Will went to him with the sensation of coaster rollers at the amusement park. He wasn't the type of guy any man or woman brought home to meet the family, he knew this. Yet here he was meeting Hannibal's uncle and aunt - the two people who raised Hannibal after he lost his parents and his sister. "Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Lecter.." "No, call me Robert...or Uncle Robert if you prefer...I dare to say you're part of the family now, going by the way Hannibal introduced you to us." Will smiled still a little unsettled, very conscious that Hannibal was watching him with a bright smile.

He went to Hannibal's aunt with his hand out but she pulled him in for a kiss on the cheeks twice as it seemed the custom here. "Welcome to the family, Will." Her voice whispered in his ear. Will felt his pulse race a little. He whispered "Thank you" back to her. She then motioned them to sit while the final preparations for dinner were being done by a few servants that Will saw passing in front of the "grand salon". Will sat on the plush sofa, fidgeting as always. Hannibal sat next to him, gently placing a palm on Will's knee to calm him down. Hannibal and Uncle Robert then exchanged news of the happenings in their lives. One of the servants entered the lounge and announced that dinner was being served. Hannibal rose and extended his hand to Will. "I'm not a girl!" Will whispered, but took Hannibal's hand anyway. Hannibal just smirked and whispered back, "But the way you scream when you cum says otherwise..." Will elbowed Hannibal, trying and failing to hide his blush. They sat at one end of the large table in the bright and sumptuous dining room. Above the 19th stone chimney, a large painting of a castle was enthroned. Will knew right away that it was the Lecter castle in Lithuania, and he saw the family arms on the right high corner of the painting for the first time: Lecter Dvaras with two standing wolves around a snake upon his coil and ready to bite. Above, there was the bearded head of a fauna...or maybe a devil. Will saw Hannibal in a new light as he understood that he was inscribed in an aristocratic family history where bloodline takes a particular meaning. And yet, he was kindly accepted in his family despite the fact that his presence on Hannibal's side meant the end of the bloodline without the possibility of descent.

Uncle Robert saw him stare at the painting and put his hand on his arm gently as he recited the resume of the family history. "After my death, Hannibal will be the eighth and, I'm afraid the last Count Lecter. Our noble family descends from the warlord Hannibal the Grim who defeated the Teutonic Order at the bloody battle of Grunwald in 1410. But, Hannibal also owns his mother's side a great deal of his character. Simonetta was a Sforza and a Visconti on her own mother's side. The two families ruled Milano for more than 250 years. She gave Hannibal her appreciation for art in all areas of life. She was a beautiful woman and very talented like our cousin Balthus, the painter, but she was killed too young to have the time to leave her print on the world..." he sighed with so many unspoken pains. Hannibal joined them and deliberately teased his uncle "Uncle, you deliberately forget the bloodiest part of our family history...From my mother's side, I may also descend from Giuliano Bevisangue, the Blood-Drinker, a feared and ruthless figure who made the reign of terror during the 12th century in Tuscany..." "This is a rumor, Hannibal. We have no evidence that..." intervened his uncle. "At least for now, it's true uncle. However, my mother's connection to Machiavelli is well documented." "True!" Robert laughed "And we can see it in you very clearly..." Robert pressed Hannibal against himself "I am so happy to have you both here tonight, Hannibal. I am not getting younger, your aunt and I we would like to see you more often, you know..." Hannibal tightened his arm around his uncle and gave him a kiss on the cheek. Will was a little taken aback to see Hannibal so affectionate with other people than him. Hannibal was full of surprise, and Will rediscovered him in so many ways in the few last days and in a way fell in love all over again.

As they took their seats, Will noticed the table set for an elaborate meal. *Ok...get this right, Graham...start from out to in*, he reminded himself glancing at the cutlery. Hannibal was seated on his right and across from Hannibal was Uncle Robert. Aunt Murasaki was facing Will, and she seemed to be intently watching him. This made Will more nervous. The servers came out with the wine; Hannibal and his uncle began conversing in French. Will understood a few words since he grew up in the French Quarter back in Louisiana. But the little French he picked up was mostly Creole. The first dish came in shortly after. "Shellfish Consomme" Murasaki said, as the dish was served. Will quickly glanced at Hannibal and followed his gesture by picking up the soup spoon. The soup was good, flavourful with a touch of seafood. Served together with the soup were a few slices of Sushi. The Sushi came in two flavors: tuna and foie gras. *Fusion food! Guess this is where Hanni learned how to cook*, Will smiled to himself as he savored the meal. While he chewed his way through the Sushi, Will noticed Murasaki's eyes on him again. *Why is she staring at me? Did I use the wrong fork again?* Will felt a hand on his knee. He turned to Hannibal, who smiled and placed another piece of Sushi onto his side plate. "Eat, Will. Time to replenish your energy after all that hard work for the FBI". Robert put his wine glass down. "FBI? Ah! So you're a field agent! Is that how you met Hannibal? Were you shot and was Hannibal your doctor, Will?"

Will flushed. "Er..no..I...I teach at the Academy. I'm a lecturer in Criminology and Behavioral Studies." "You teach the Trainees how to think like killers." Murasaki's voice startled him. Will swallowed and nodded. Somehow, her words seemed to gather a different meaning, which kept playing in the corner of Will's mind throughout dinner. "We met at a symposium, Uncle. Will was one of the speakers...I must confess, he was the ONLY interesting speaker that day." Hannibal said, a light blush coloring his cheekbones. "I must admit I was a little surprised to hear about your sudden divorce, Hannibal. But I can see that you are happy. Even though you do not seek my blessing and approval, I shall give it all the same..." Robert raised his wine glass. "To new beginnings" He announced, as Murasaki held up her wine glass. Hannibal and Will raised their glasses too. When the next dish was served, Will just blinked. He knew it was pork *real pork, not the 'pigs' that Hanni liked* Will laughed inside. "Crispy pork served with taro root puree, mostarda, soybeans, and mushrooms. Hannibal was rather fond of pork in his younger days.." Robert said, chuckling. "That reminds me, Will...I should probably do what most parents do when meeting their child's date..I should tell you about all the embarrassing things Hannibal did when he was a teenager!" Will joined in the laughter while Hannibal just rolled his eyes and grumbled. "Uncle, please..." Murasaki herself was laughing. "We have a few photos, Will." She said, winking at Hannibal, who pouted.

The pork was simply too good for words. Will once again savored every bite, wondering if this was the chef who taught Hannibal how to cook. Hannibal signaled for more wine while Will noticed Murasaki's gaze again. As if reading his thoughts, she looked right into Will's eyes and tilted her head slightly. Will looked away, uncomfortable with direct eye contact. Murasaki then turned her gaze away. To keep from feeling awkward, Will helped himself to

the salad. *When did the salad appear? Jeez, get a grip, Graham! Now you're daydreaming again*. "Is it your first time in Paris?" asked Aunt Murasaki. Will turned to look at her directly in the eyes, and she was surprised by his change of attitude. She smiled faintly as if she found what she was looking for. "Yes, and it's amazing! Hannibal is an excellent guide and he loves this city with passion..." "Yes...Hannibal has always been very passionate, but very few people can see that. You have to be very special, Will..." Will smiled openly "I don't know about that...but yes, Hannibal and I found each other, being alone in our own way." Knowing that he might just go on babbling again, Will reached for his wine and then grabbed the napkin to dab his lips. Murasaki kept watching but she didn't say anything further. Instead, she turned to Hannibal and began to speak in Japanese. Will's jaw hung open when Hannibal replied. "Don't be alarmed, Will" Robert said, with a soft chuckle. "This is one of Hannibal's talents. He's fluent in at least six languages...They both always shared secrets with me speaking Japanese. My wife and Hannibal are very close, and they understand each other very well. Without her, I think Hannibal would have lost it when he first came to us."

Will nodded without really listening to him. *Wow! Hanni sounds so sexy..* Will thought to himself. The servants then brought in dessert. Will frowned at the green layered-cake. "Something light after all that food. This is another one of Hannibal's favorites, Will. It's simple to make..perhaps I could give you the recipe before you leave." Murasaki said, smiling. Will blinked rapidly and then nodded. "Yeah..I mean..sure. I'd love to try making it for Hanni..er Hannibal..." Hannibal squeezed Will's hand. "You are allowed to call me that in public, Dear. Don't worry. And just in case you're wondering what this is, it's a light rum-soaked sponge layered with matcha mascarpone cream. Topped with mousse and sweetened adzuki beans." Will didn't wait for Hannibal to finish his description. He grabbed the fork and started his way into the cake. It was simply delicious! They talked and laughed while eating their cakes. Uncle Robert took Aunt Murasaki's hand and smiled to her while explaining to Hannibal that they will go to stay in Japan for a while at the end of the month. He said that it was very fortunate that he found them still in Paris as he didn't tell them before their departure from Baltimore. Hannibal felt that there was more to that decision to leave for Japan, but he didn't inquire now. He knew his uncle will talk to him later if he wanted. Hannibal looked at Aunt Murasaki and they exchanged a meaningful gaze.

ESPRIT DE FAMILLE

Chapter Notes

For Kim, we appreciate your support and have to try better just for you XXX

“Will, do you like whiskey?” asked Uncle Robert while they were heading to the smoking room. “Sure! Whiskey is my favorite indulgence...though I got more since I lived with Hannibal. Your nephew is an incredible chef...” Uncle Robert smiled at him gently “Yes, Hannibal has many talents. What do you think about tasting a Hedonism Quindecimus 20 years old...” “Woah! Never heard of that one before...” “Only a few bottles are produced each year and I keep it for rare occasions like today. I wish to celebrate this occasion. You see, I haven’t seen Hannibal since his wedding. And now, to see him again...introducing the love of his life to my wife and I...” Murasaki touched her husband’s shoulder. “Getting sentimental in your age, Robert?” “My dear, I’ve always been rather sentimental” Robert chuckled. Will just glanced at Hannibal and thought Yeah, maybe someday Hanni and I will be like this, growing old together. Robert went to the bar and took the crystal bottle standing on a shelf among other whiskey brand bottles. He put it on the counter, bent to take four glasses and served them. Hannibal sniffed the contents of his glass and turned the glass in his hand for the scent to rise to his nose. He smiled in appreciation, not yet ready to sip it, anticipation was an art he cultivated in every aspect of his life.

They sat on the two leather couches separated by a heavy mahogany table. “Hannibal, I told you that we will be leaving for Japan soon....Murasaki needs to enhance her position in her clan and she cannot do that behind abroad....” “And?” Hannibal encouraged him. “ And, there was an unfortunate incident. You know that I take care of the family wealth and that I normally don’t bother you with the details...” “You have my trust, Uncle.” “ I know I have, boy. Anyway, one of our company got a deal with one of those African warlords to get access to a diamond mine that we already owned but we had to stop mining during the high of the hostilities. He wanted arms and vehicles, and we agreed. The mine reopened and all seemed good, but one month ago I received an email saying he wanted the same shipment to continue to ensure the security of the workers there. I told the director of the company to get in touch with him personally and to tell him that he already got what we agreed on and he has to keep his side of the deal. It didn’t go well and the schmuck hid behind my name when the guy threatened to visit him and his family. You kind of wonder why you pay those guys so much to manage companies and holdings when they are so prompt to break confidentiality...So here we are, your aunt and I coming back from a dinner party, and as soon as the driver left us in front of the building to go to park the car, three menacing big guys came out of the shadow with a message of the warlord saying that if we didn’t double the delivery soon they will take care of us for good. To be sure that we understand the message one of them put his hand on your aunt, and you can imagine the result. They had to carry him when they left as the guy

wasn't able to walk anymore...for life, she makes sure of that. So, I don't want to deal with that kind of violence at my age, and your aunt isn't so young anymore. All we aspire now is serenity, and maybe we will be better among her clan for protection if needed."

Although they were conversing in low tones, Will heard the gist of what Hannibal and his uncle were discussing. He glanced at Murasaki, who was browsing through a worn recipe book. She then plucked out a random page and handed it to Will. "The recipe as promised, Will," She said, handing the piece of paper to him. Will took the paper and stared at the words. "It's in French..." "I'm sure you know what it means. You can understand the language, as Hannibal can. Perhaps I should translate.." "No. It's fine! I...I can always find out." Will said, folding the paper and putting it into his shirt pocket. "I do want to surprise Hanni...since it's something he enjoys eating." Murasaki once again looked at him intently. Then she gently touched Will's arm. "Hannibal...was always so mysterious. I thought it was because of his past. But there was always something hidden within him that he tried to compress. Now, I believe he embraced it. I think you understand what I'm saying, Will Graham." Will swallowed. She knows about Hanni. She knows that I know about Hanni, Will nodded slowly. "I..Hannibal means the world to me. His past is his. I want to be his future, if he allows it. I...I love him, and I don't care what anyone thinks or says. He's mine and I'm his." Will saw the slight shift in emotion on Murasaki's face. "I'm glad Hannibal has found a soulmate in you, Will. He was always so lost. Now I think he has found his compass." "I am not sure he was lost, and I am not sure that people who know me would call me a compass. Most of my colleagues think I am weird if not that I lost it, you see. But in a way, you are right, none of us are lost anymore because we found each other, and it's all that matter. I don't want to sound too romantic, but yes soulmates seems to be the right word to describe what we have..." "Nakama..." Murasaki whispers with dreaming eyes, and Will just smiled faintly while sipping his whiskey with delight.

Hannibal frowned while his uncle Robert was explaining the other reason they were leaving Paris. In a way, he felt a little guilty for not being around to protect them, as they did with him when he was younger. The sacred social contract between the old and young generations held even stronger with bloodline. It pleased him to know they decided to leave for Japan, at least he knew that his aunt Murasaki was longing for her natural environment for years, but didn't say because Robert was happy in Paris. They will be happy in Tokyo too, he already knew as they both appreciated each of their stays there. Nonetheless, he felt the urge to avenge a wrong. How dare those pigs threaten my family! Hannibal was quietly fuming inside. "I will see to that ugly encounter, and make sure that it didn't happen again, Uncle." "You are a good boy, Hannibal." his uncle sighed while he patted his arm above the coffee table. Hannibal could see Murasaki's head turned rapidly in his direction to meet his eyes, but didn't give in. She wasn't happy, and he didn't want to open to her now. Will didn't miss anything of the exchanges, but he kept silent as well. Hannibal will tell him later if he wanted. He had said that he wanted him, beast and all, and he meant every word of it. The atmosphere was suddenly very serious between the four of them as if a blood oath was proclaimed and just sealed...and in fact, it just did and they all knew.

After a very long pause, Robert said, "Will, I believe my wife and I promised you some embarrassing stories about Hannibal". Will chuckled, as Murasaki stood up and walked towards the bookshelf. She pulled out a faded album. "Merde!" Hannibal cursed softly. Murasaki ignored him, sat beside Will and opened the album. "This...was taken when Hannibal turned 13 years old." Will saw a teenager with fire in his eyes, dressed like a model in Vanity Fair. The contrast was striking between the wild coming from the soul through the eyes and the soft and polish appearance. "He was a fearsome adolescent. Nothing could make him change his mind once he was determined. At the beginning, it was difficult for him to make friends at school, but soon he was very appreciated by his teachers. And from that, he never stopped studying and learning with a devouring passion. We had to bend some rules for him to be able to attend university and medical school at such a young age. And then, Bedelia's father accepted him at the Necker hospital for his internship. We never stopped to be proud of him..." Will heard the pride in Robert's voice, and saw the same in Murasaki's eyes. She showed him some more pictures and Robert told him some more stories. He noticed that Hannibal stiffened a little when Robert mentioned his private piano lessons, and Will instinctively knew why. He imagined the wild and brilliant young man tamed by the mellowness of an attentive music teacher.

Some pictures came to his mind, and he felt a burst of jealousy. Hannibal's body at 16, untouched and wanting to learn more about physical pleasure, pushed by hormonal rush. Will remembered his own life at 16; he had a sudden growth spurt but still kept his boyish looks. He knew he was attracted to both boys and girls. He was still shy and socially awkward. He tried to date but it didn't last. Some of the seniors made fun of him for being the odd boy at school. The only reason he decided to grow a beard in college was so that he looked older. With his beard, he could walk into a bar and not be asked for identification. He got some one night stands like this, with women and men alike, but it was always sour as it was only sex and nothing else. He thought he had a connection with Alana Bloom, but even that fizzled out because they had different expectations. Hannibal was Will's personal miracle, the one person who understood Will's faults and saw them as something beautiful. Will felt good with Hannibal's family. A strange feeling of belonging here, for someone who never felt included. As Will flipped through more pages, a small faded photograph slipped out onto his lap. Will carefully picked it up and turned it over.

It was a black and white photograph of a couple with their son and daughter. The man had the same hairstyle as Hannibal...Hanni's parents, Will's eyes widened. He studied the photograph, focusing on the little girl. She couldn't have been more than 4 years old, with light colored hair and a sweet smile. "Misha..." Hannibal's voice sounded broken as he glanced at the photograph in Will's hand. "She would have loved you, Will." That was the most beautiful compliment that Hannibal could say, uncle Robert and aunt Murasaki looked at each other, silence telling a lot between them and Will read it as well. Uncle Robert later called for his driver to bring them a bag before they left. The man didn't ask a question he knew what his boss was talking about. He carried the bag and put it in the trunk of the black

Bentley before to open the door for Hannibal and Will. On the way to the hotel, Hannibal and the driver Jean spoke in French. Will understood that they spoke about the men who ambushed uncle Robert and aunt Murasaki downstairs of their residence. It seemed that Jean was taking it very personally and Hannibal was telling him that his help was appreciated but that he will take care of the following action himself. They also exchanged information about a six-story mansion Avenue Foch. Jean told him he had spent quite a few nights to watch the habits of the people there. He told him about his notebook in the bag, with the blueprint of the building they were able to get. Hannibal thanked him and told him that if his uncle or aunt had been killed in the ambush he would have killed him for his failure. The man said he understood and thanked Hannibal but still insisted that he wanted to be part of the cleaning to avenge his failure. Hannibal told him that his duty was with his boss and wife and not in a personal vendetta. Then they both stayed silent the rest of the trip.

LES LIENS DU SANG

Once they got back to their hotel, Will had barely entered their suite before Hannibal pinned him to the wall and kissed him soundly. Breathless, Will chuckled. "Wow! If this is going to happen every time we visit your family, let's go visit them as often as possible!" Hannibal smiled, kissing Will's cheeks, nose, and lips. "They adore you, Will. And what I said about Misha is true. She would have loved you. You and she are quite alike in some ways, especially your love for animals." Will caressed Hannibal's cheek. "I see it in your eyes, Hanni. And I can hear the cogs of your brain grinding. What are you thinking about?" Hannibal pulled Will towards the bed and they both fell onto the satin bed covers. Lying beside each other, Hannibal reached for Will's hand and placed it on his chest just above his heart. "Revenge...and possibly a warning...I...I couldn't stop the bastards who killed my parents. Neither could I save my sister from them. But I want to protect Uncle Robert and Aunt Murasaki..." Will rolled to the side and laid his head on Hannibal's chest. "Let me help you..." Will's voice was a whisper but Hannibal heard it all the same. Hannibal held Will close and breathed in Will's scent. A plan was already in his head as he spoke to Will. Will remembered the notebook and blueprints Jean gave to Hannibal. He knew that the bag must have contained weapons too, this was Hannibal after all and his uncle knew him well. "I want to help, Hanni." Will offered again. "I want to experience this part of you together. Please." Hannibal glanced down at Will's face. "I would gladly take you with me, my Beloved." And so the next day, just after midnight, Will found himself clinging to Hannibal as they rode on a motorcycle to the location.

It was 3am and the street of the most prestigious neighborhood of the French capital was deserted. Paris paraded like a dream before his eyes. He was excited at the idea to share something so dangerous with Hannibal, the frenzy of blood, the killing. They arrived in front of the six-story mansion that now he knew so well from the plans in the notebook and blueprints. Hannibal parked on the sidewalk in front of the next building. They didn't speak but their gazes to each other spoke of excitement and love. Hannibal crossed the street and went to the intercom of the next building. He put a small apparel on it and Will heard the door opening. No special security in this building, they took the lift to the last floor. It was unoccupied, mainly maids rooms used as attic to store old furniture and family memories. Hannibal didn't lose time and went to the nearest door, Will walking quietly beside him. With one foot kick, he broke the entrance and immediately went to the roof window. He drew a commode under the window and clung to open it wide. Then he turned to Will and extended his hand to help him stand on the commode next to him. "Remember what we discussed, Will. Stay behind me and watch my back." He kissed him briefly before to help him through the window. Will felt the breeze and in the same moment embraced the amazing view of Paris by night.

It was unreal to feel at the same time the beauty and the excitement of danger. He knew he could easily become an addict of that cocktail as his brain responded to it with such pleasure.

He was squatting on the tiles when Hannibal came out of the window and climbed to the roof ridge that made a kind of small path from one roof to the next for the chimney sweeper service. Will followed him and they quickly accessed the next building where their target was resting unaware of his coming death. Jean had informed them that the African warlord arrived in Paris two days ago. Hannibal decided it was too good to miss, and after speaking on the phone with his uncle about the possible repercussions on the field, his fate was sealed. The man kept himself busy with prostitutes and nightclubs, but because jetlag was heading home like Cinderella after midnight. The sixth story was a big recreation room with pool, home theatre system, and a bar, so it should be easy to access this way. The leader's room was on the next floor but Jean wrote that he saw at least ten armed men going and coming into the mansion. They would encounter some resistance but luck was for now on their side. Hannibal cautiously walked on the tiles until he was positioned above the terrace of the recreation room. He then turned to Will and waved to join him. Together they hold on the end of the roof to jump silently on the terrace. Hannibal put his ear against the window and listened. Then he took the dagger from his belt and slid the blade between the two doors of the bay window. He slid the blade through the closing mechanism and without a sound opened the doors.

Hannibal went in and right away threw his dagger to the right. A muffled cry sounded as the blade met its target. The blade went through the throat of a man who was getting up from the couch. His eyes went wide while his hands went to the dagger handle. Will snorted, "I wouldn't pull the dagger out if I were you...unless you want to die instantly. My boyfriend knows his way around the human anatomy." Hannibal tried not to smile at his beloved's humor. He kept his eyes fixed on the man who was choking on his own blood. Two more gurgles and the man fell dead back on the couch politely respecting the silence they needed. Hannibal went to him and retrieved his dagger. Immediately, blood began to spurt out. Anticipating this, Hannibal stepped back to avoid the blood splatter. He wiped the blade nonchalantly on the clothes of the dead man. Hannibal moved to the stairs and Will followed. He knew no one else was around or Hannibal would have heard their beating pulse or smelt them, predator skills at their highest level. Will knew he shouldn't feel so invigorated as he did now, but he really couldn't help it. This was something he and Hannibal were doing together. We're on a MURDER DATE, Will almost laughed out loud when that thought crossed his mind. Hannibal stood against the wall at the corner of the corridor opening on a succession of doors. Two men sat sleeping in front of a door. It was nice of them to indicate which room they had to go...Hannibal signaled two men to Will with hands and invited him to have a look for himself. Will bent over the corner and wondered where were the other guards. A paranoiac warlord should have more than two guards even in Paris. The two guards had a Kalashnikov on their lap, so they could wake up the whole household.

"Let me handle them, Hanni...you go look for that son of a bitch" Will whispered. Hannibal frowned. "Please be careful..." Will raised a finger to Hannibal's lips. "Don't worry. I'll make it quick and join you for the finale." Hannibal's heart skipped a beat. He wanted to watch his Beloved's first kill. But now he had other matters to handle. They both walked through the corridor to the guards. Hannibal went to the door on the other side of the corridor,

while Will squatted in front of the two sleeping guards. They stank of sweat and gin. Even awake they would not have been worthy adversaries. Will brought his dagger to the throat of the guard on his left, and in the same movement sliced across both men's throats. Then he rapidly retrieved the machine guns from them while they were jerking awake with their hands clamped at their throats. Will brought his finger to his lips commanding the two guards to be silent. "Please die quietly...Hanni and I are on a tight schedule" Will whispered, with a sly smile. He stood up and before the guys were able to make noise he slammed the butt of a Kalashnikov on their faces... Nice and quiet. Hannibal was standing behind him and when he turned he saw him smile at him fondly. Hannibal's hand was on the doorknob of the room opposite to the warlord, he turned it and entered the room. Three bunk beds were disposed of in there like in a military casern. The two men on the opposite of the door were setting up in their bed without doubt awakened by the opening of the door. Survivors of war have a very light sleep Will thought.

Hannibal was already on them when Will entered the room closing the door behind him. Hannibal slammed the head of the man on the upper bed against the metal frame with a crack noise, then he was already with his dagger in the eyes of the man sitting on the bed below. Some noise was inevitable and the four other men woke up as well. Hannibal moved incredibly fast to the next bunk bed and repeat the exact same scenario as an automatism, with the same result. Will went to the bunk bed nearest to the door, and put his dagger with two hands against the chest of the man getting up from the bed below. Between the man's velocity getting up and Will's rapid movement to him, the blade sank between the ribs and in his heart as in butter. The man on the upper bunk jumped on Will's shoulders and they rolled on the floor. Hannibal grabbed him by the hair and lifted him to the height of his other hand that quickly cut his throat with such force that his head stayed practically in his hand. Will drew back, leaning on his elbows, trying to escape the bloody shower, but without complete success. Nobody moved in the room anymore. The silence fell again around them. Hannibal looked at Will with adoration while he held out his arm to help him up. In the moonlight pouring through the window, Will looked like a mythological god of death, his face splattered with blood and his eyes shining with bloodlust. This glorious vision of his beloved stored in his mind palace to contemplate later, he could not stop himself to take Will in his arms; to feel the warmth of his body and the calm beating of his heart against his chest.

"You look lovely in red, my dear," Hannibal said, his lips hovering near Will's ear. Will smirked. "Sounds like you want me to wear red more often." Will whispered back, as he pulled away to look into Hannibal's eyes. It was magnetic between them and in synergy, they draw closer for a deep and long kiss. "Now the grand finale..." Hannibal told him before he went to the door. Will almost giggled, but he kept quiet as he followed Hannibal. They spanned the bodies of the two guards trying not to walk in the big pool of blood in which they were bathing now. The coppery smell of blood in this confined space was intoxicating. Will thought of how he always loved it on crime scene as well but never allowed himself to think so even in the secret of his mind. He realized that before Hannibal he was jailed by his own secret and how he had been easy to embrace Hannibal's dark side as a liberation. They entered the master bedroom without a sound. A very large bed throned in the middle of the

room. Hannibal went directly for the war lord's head and punched him hard before he could remove the gun from under his pillow. He tried to fight but Hannibal had the upper hand and sat on his chest holding his knife to his throat. The man froze with eyes wide and crazy. Will could see that he was trying to understand how they could be here, in his bedroom.

The blonde in his bed tried to run away but Will grabbed her by the throat. "No sweetheart, you're not getting away..." Will wrapped his left arm tightly around her throat, squeezing while she struggled to try to pull his arm away. Will breathed in profoundly, he was at peace feeling an ecstatic pleasure flow through his body. As he felt her weakening against him, the feeling of power became overwhelming. He tightened his grip on her neck. He kept his face close to hers to enjoy her last breaths. When there were none, he looked at Hannibal and saw the pride in his eyes. Her limp body fell to the floor as a discarded cocoon from which a dark monster arose. "God! It felt good!" Will moved away from the dead woman and walked closer to his lover. Hannibal smiled brightly at him not losing sight of the man under the dagger blade who strangely seemed to have been energized by the sight of Will strangling the woman who shared his bed. "Who are you, guys? Whoever paid you for that job, I can offer you more..." Hannibal did not bother to answer him, but still with a bright smile on his face asked Will "If you would be so kind as to keep our guest quiet while I'm busy with the preparations". Will smiled back. "Sure thing, Hanni.." Will got to work at once, tying the man's hands to the bedpost and gagging him. He made sure the knots were secure, while his heart thumped wildly in his chest. Once Will moved away from the bed, Hannibal came to sit near the warlord "You should have thought better than to threaten my family. That makes this very personal ...and I must say much more painful for you. For once I will accept some constraints because I don't want to attract attention while my lover and I tour Europe, but it is generally the case for many artists, isn't it? Nevertheless, a mutual friend gave me the details of the punishment that your adversary used whenever they caught one of you alive. It seems quite enjoyable."

The warlord sneered. His words were muffled by the gag. His eyes narrowed at Hannibal, then at Will. His glance paused on Will, trying to read him. Will stared back, with a knowing smirk. He walked up to Hannibal, lovingly touched his shoulder. "I think he's wondering who I am..." Hannibal smiled at Will. "He doesn't need to know...pigs like him are not worthy of your attention, my dear." Hannibal then took out a scalpel from his pocket. "Beloved, shall I show you how to carve a pig?" Will was still in the power set of mind and just smile blissfully "Oh yes! Let me cut the pig..." he took the scalpel and followed Hannibal's instructions. The trick was not to kill him too fast, enjoying his suffering and his effort. Will was good at his new hobby, carving human flesh. "You are a natural, Will. It is beautiful to see you like this." Hannibal told him, his voice in awe of so much adoration. All the while, the warlord struggled and groaned in pain. But he could do nothing except watch the blade slice through his skin and flesh. Once Will was satisfied with the slashes he made, Hannibal reached into his black bag and took out a bottle. Will chuckled. "Vinegar? Right...season the meat..." The warlord's eyes widened and he began to shake his head from side to side. He was all too familiar with the effects of vinegar on open wounds. By now, he was frantically trying to scream through the gag, as if begging them not to continue. Hannibal, of course,

ignored him. He unscrewed the cap and began to drizzle the vinegar all over the pig's body. Again, the warlord tried to scream through his gag but no one heard. Will looked at Hannibal with admiration. He finally understood viscerally what it meant to do bad things to bad people and how it makes you feel good...It was horrifying, and yet it made him feel pleased and empowered. They played with him like this for an hour and at the end, the warlord had accepted his fate and just wanted to die.

Hannibal then took the scalpel out once again and proceeded to make a familiar incision on the warlord's chest. The pig was still alive, but barely. Yet, Hannibal wanted him to watch as the pig's heart was removed while he was still conscious. Will watched in awe. It was like witnessing surgery and a secret ritual, and of course, Hannibal was in his element. Slowly the layers of skin, muscle, and tissue were peeled back until finally, the ribcage came into view. Hannibal didn't bother cutting through the ribs; he just thrust his hand through and grabbed the still beating muscle. With the scalpel he cut the tissue and arteries around; there was not so much blood now, and so Hannibal took the heart out to show it to Will "For you my Love, it's a celebration of life. I will cook it for you." They kissed above the dead body, the distinct coppery taste of blood intoxicating in each other mouth. It was hard for them to keep control of their impulses, but with two guards still alive at the entrance, now was not the moment. Will let go of Hannibal, his hands loosely gripping his lover's shoulder. He was breathing hard, trying to calm down from the high. "I love you so much, you cannibal!" Will hissed out the words, kissing Hannibal softly then abruptly moving away. For a good few seconds, Hannibal froze. Then he remembered the bloody organ in his hand. He rose slowly and carefully placed the organ into the small cooler in the bag. He reviewed in his mind the details of the punishment and began to arrange the body on the blood-soaked bed sheets.

NUIT DE SANG ET DE PASSION

Hannibal knew that the fact that they didn't rape the blond whore was not looking good for the credibility of their narrative for the French police. However, he was rather confident that they will overlook that detail to go for the importation of tribal conflict on French territory. Once he was satisfied with the arrangement, Hannibal turned to Will, and they walked out of the room hand in hand. Even with constraints, Hannibal was satisfied to leave an amazing artful tableau for the French investigators. He indulged in a little proud smile to Will, who looked so beautiful with splatters of blood all over his angelic face. He listened by the door, and everything was quiet. They took the stairs to the ground floor as silent as ghosts. While they approached the main marble staircase, which split in two sides of the entrance door, they heard voices in a birdy language. Hannibal flattened himself against the wall and retreated a little along the corridor to speak in Will's ear. "There is no way to get past them without being shot at...it's too open. We have to draw one of them inside and deal with them separately." Will nodded his understanding. They went one floor up again and checked what seemed to be a reception grand salon and different business offices. On one desk, there were opened packs of white powder piled on one end, and at the other end, a small scale used to weigh their repartition in small plastic bags.

Will abhorred drug dealers. *Death was too good for them...* Will thought, as his eyes scanned the rest of the room. Hannibal took two small packs and put them in his pockets, then he disposed some glasses on the coffee table and told Will "Pull your turtleneck up to your nose, give me one minute when I go through the door and break the glasses making as much noise as you can." Will nodded and his hand went to Hannibal's neck to draw him to his mouth. They kissed gently as a promise for more. Hannibal put his turtleneck on his nose and went on the balcony above the staircase, staying in the shadows. He sliced open two packets of the drug and threw the powder in the air. It glittered a little in the moonlight coming from the skylight above, and it fell slowly like snow. All in all a beautiful sight, and deadly for those unaware downstairs. At that point, a big cascading of breaking glasses resonated in the entrance hall. One of the guards shouted loudly three times what seemed a question, while simultaneously he exchanged laughing comments with his stooge. With no answer, he sent his subordinate to check the situation. Not the first time that one of the guys tried to steal some coke for his own benefit, they all do. Much enough for everyone to get rich and their boss was sometimes a little too rigid about what he considered his property. Greed is universal after all.

The guard got up from his chair and went up the stairs to the second floor shouting something in his birdy language to the supposed robber in the office. Hannibal was waiting for him against the wall in the office while Will stayed in the shadow out of view. As the guard entered the office he felt the effect of the drug in his system already and his lack of

coordination delayed him in reaching the doorknob at the first trial. Anyway, uninhibited coordination wouldn't have helped him as Hannibal put his knife through his throat. There was silence except for a few gargles from the guy, who choked and slipped on his own blood, falling across the doorstep. Will came out of the shadows to help Hannibal to draw him in the corner behind the door, but blood was still spattering from his neck and left a large streak on the floor. The scent was so strong and intoxicating. Will could hardly hide the fact that he liked it. He always liked it whenever he was called out to crime scenes to do his 'magic trick'. He smiled to himself with some recognition for his dark side. By the time they got the dead guard out of the way, Hannibal and Will waited for the second guard. It would only be a matter of time before he realized his fellow thug was not responding to his call from downstairs. The lovers hid in the shadows while trying not to breathe too loudly. A rough voice called out from the floor below, followed by heavy footsteps up the stairs. Will and Hannibal shared a glance as they nodded to each other. The footsteps grew louder as the thug walked towards the room.

The thug was a large man, almost as tall as Hannibal, with broader shoulders and bulky arms. He entered the room and paused, sniffing the air. He coughed and then noticed the pool of blood. He muttered something in a foreign language and cursed his careless fellow thug for falling prey to the intruders. Then he smiled as his eyes fell on the opened packets of cocaine. Before he could reach for the table, he sensed something behind him and lashed out. His elbow almost caught Will in the stomach, but Will dodged in time. The thug turned to pounce on Will only to have Hannibal leap onto his back. Will struck out his hand, blade ready, and slashed the thug across his abdomen. Hannibal tried to hold on, but he was thrown off. He fell back onto a sagging sofa. The thug clutched his wound and charged after Will. Will was caught off guard, as he saw Hannibal fall back. The thug was on top of him now, his thick fingers around Will's throat. Will struggled, his knife fell from his hand. He groped around trying to grab it again. Instead, Will grabbed some spilled cocaine and threw it into the thug's eyes. With a shout, the thug loosened his hold, and Will kicked him in the abdomen, right near his knife wound. The large man staggered back, his eyes burning while he coughed from the raw cocaine. By now Hannibal had slowly risen from the sofa, his own blood boiling *how DARE he touch my Beloved!*

Before the thug could regain his balance, Hannibal once again leaped onto the man's back. Pulling his head back, Hannibal bit into the thug's throat. Incapacitated by the effect of the drug he just sagged onto the floor and watched Will while expiring his last breath. By now they were both stoned by the cocaine floating in the air. Hannibal extended his arm to help Will get up. "I don't think it would be wise to drive away right now. I am not sure I could keep my balance after so much cocaine in my system. Let's find the kitchen and have some breakfast first." Will smiled, then laughed heartily. "I...only YOU could feel hungry after a night like this!" Hannibal kissed his lover silent, and Will indulged him. The kitchen was on the same floor, modern and professional even if it seemed that nobody really used it for some time. Will sat on a metal counter-top on one side of the kitchen island, while Hannibal put his bag beside Will and went through the different cupboards to find what he needed. A cutting board, a pan and some onions and red peppers from the fridge. First, he put some rice to boil

and got busy slicing the heart into thin slices. His gaze went to meet Will's who was like hypnotized watching him. Hannibal's bloody hand gently stroked Will's cheek and Will leaned into it with a small moan of contentment. A soft rumble broke interrupted the scene. Hannibal arched his eyebrows. "Guess I'm not the only one who's hungry!"

Will playfully smacked Hannibal's shoulder, then he slid off the counter and proceeded to check on the rice while Hannibal minced the vegetables and cooked the heart. "Yeah, yeah...go ahead and laugh...it's not my fault I have an active digestive system. I AM a healthy young man after all..." Will's voice was teasing. Hannibal saw his lover smirk and knew it was a joke about his age. "I assure you, dearest...that my age doesn't affect my appetite when you are concerned." Will chuckled. "...yeah, keep telling yourself that, Old Man..." Will's words then turned into a squeal as he felt Hannibal tickle his sides. "Hanni! Stop!" Will threw his head back and laughed, while trying to squirm out of Hannibal's embrace. Hannibal captured Will's earlobe with his teeth, softly biting it. "Might I remind you....this Old Man's stamina is just as strong as yours.." "Oh my god, Hannibal! Please stop it now, I am not sure I can control myself..." Hannibal let go of his lover and regretfully went back to the pan where the onions were nicely browning. He threw a hungry look at Will "I'd rather take you in our suite than here but before long you will have to withdraw your mocking comments on my age, young man!" Will rolled his eyes, deliberately swayed his hips while he stirred the pot of rice. Noting that the rice was done, Will found a colander and drained the water from the pot. The rice was soft and fluffy, just right for the meal.

Hannibal got two plates and artistically dished out the slices of heart, onions and red peppers before adding a spoon of rice on the other side. They sat at the kitchen table lost in each others eyes. Hannibal broke the fond and complicit silence "Mylimasis, you never cease to surprise me. Tonight I saw you as the warrior that you are, bloody, merciless and beautiful. This heart is your triumph, please enjoy your meal." Before Hannibal could take a bite from his fork, Will grabbed his wrist and brought it closer to his own mouth. Will bit off a piece of heart from Hannibal's fork, his eyes never leaving Hannibal's face. Will then pulled out the fork, placed it on the table and kissed Hannibal's hand, keeping it against his face "I don't know what you see in me Hannibal, but I've never felt so serene and content, and I know that it is because of you. I love you." Hannibal leaned over the table and gently kissed Will's mouth "As do I. We shall have more murder dates like this one if it puts you in such a romantic mood, my Love." They smiled at each other, eyes still fixed on each other's faces, and ate in silence.

After that they properly cleaned the dishes and the kitchen, they put their gloves on again and nonchalantly head hand in hand to the main gate. Hannibal kissed Will's curls while they passed through the gate, they crossed the street to find the motorcycle where they had parked it two hours ago. Traffic was already dense around the Arc of Triomphe at the end of the avenue, but their hotel was less than ten minutes from here. They arrived there not soon enough, and it took them a great deal of self-control not to run to the lift through the deserted

lobby, but as soon the doors closed, it was a scrum of arms and lips. Will moaned loudly grinding against Hannibal “I...I so want...you..” They were not able to leave each other mouths when the doors opened at their floor and at that early hour nobody was strolling the corridor so Hannibal half carried Will, half pushed him to their room and kissed him hard against the door before to fumble in his pocket to find the keycard. With a click sound, the light went green on the lock and Hannibal pushed Will inside before to kick the door behind them. Will was like fire against him helping him to give a new meaning to the expression “painfully hard”. He grabbed his thighs and carried him to the bed. They fell on it and bounced letting go of the other mouth before to laugh together with the same heart. Will’s hand was already on the zipper of Hannibal’s leather jacket and he deliberately slid it slowly down looking into Hannibal’s lidded black eyes. “Stop teasing me, Beloved. You know too well...how hard it is to control myself when it comes to you” Hannibal said, his voice strained. Will groaned in reply. “Enough...talking....make love to me...Hannibal...”

Hannibal gently kissed Will and began to undress him like a kid would open a wrapper on Christmas Eve. Will arched back allowing Hannibal to remove his shirt. Hannibal then frowned; Will’s naked upper body bore the bruises from the thug they had fought earlier. Will’s throat bore distinct finger marks, which made Hannibal fume silently. Will realized Hannibal was staring at his throat. He touched it gingerly. “Hey...Hanni....it’s ok....maybe you could kiss is better..” Will said softly. Hannibal leaned over and began kissing the bruises. Where there were small scratches, he licked the skin. Will giggled. “Hanni! You’re like a...like a feline...tending to his cub...” Hannibal rested his forehead on Will’s. “When I saw him...grab your throat...I could only think of tearing him to pieces. No one touches what is MINE!” Will stroked the back of Hannibal’s head. “Hey..shh....I’m here...I’m ok...we’re both ok. Hanni...Hanni look at me!” Hannibal slowly looked up into those beautiful blue eyes, which bewitched him that first time at the symposium. “Hannibal....you’re mine, as I am yours. Anyone who tries to take one of us away from the other..well, they deserve a painful death.” Hannibal had to kiss Will instantly. His beloved’s words clenched his heart.

Will unbuttoned Hannibal shirt and slithered it with the leather jacket in the same movement stroking his shoulder and pulling him against his chest. He needed to feel him solid and strong and real to ground him in the moment while all the evening events were whirling in his mind trying to catch his attention. Hannibal was in the curve of his neck kissing, licking with content sighs and loving words. Will sighed, “I....I want you....so badly.....please...” Hannibal leaned back on his knees and opened Will’s pants before to get up and took his shoes, socks, and pants away for him. Will arched and pulled his boxers down himself before he kicked it on the floor. Hannibal looked at Will’s naked body...which seemed like a painter’s palette degraded from blue to yellow already. In Hannibal’s mind, Will was even more beautiful like this if possible. It was the color of his triumph in their evening murder date, perfection! He took his shoes off and his pants followed quickly. He leaned on Will and engulfed him in his arms while sliding himself between his legs. He stopped himself from taking him raw like this only because Will grunted with pain from his weight on his bruised

body. "Stop...thinking about the...bruises...." Will said, his breathing labored. "I...will not cause you further pain, my dear..." Hannibal said, carefully leaning over Will's side to take the lubricant from the bedside table. Will's hands slid on his sides and prolonged the caress along his throbbing dick. Hannibal shuddered before to knelt away from his hand, making a display of putting lube on his fingers.

Flames seemed to pass from Hannibal's eyes to Will's, lust burning excruciatingly between them. Hannibal leaned against Will on one arm to find his mouth and felt their tongues sliding along each other as he gently stroke Will's hole with his wet fingers. Will pushed himself on them not wanting to wait anymore "Shush Mylimasis! Let me open you up properly for me. Your body doesn't need to suffer further abuse...just relax...let me make love to you..." Will obeyed and relaxed under Hannibal's expert caresses, moaning loudly enough to wake up their neighbors next door. His reaction was rewarded by Hannibal's smug smirk. "You...oh god...you are..an arrogant...old man..." Hannibal who was fighting now not to just fuck him hard as he was, just found enough strength to smile back "Do you want me to stop, my Love..." Will chuckled "Don't...oh...don't play so hard...I already...I already have you..." "Yes, my love, you already have..." answered Hannibal while he leaned between his thighs. Will felt everything as Hannibal entered him. Like the rush of water in a torrent river, flowing against the rocks, slamming the surface but leaving the rocks undamaged. It was an immense pleasure which could not be put in words. He knew Hannibal spoke many languages, but here now...as they made love, it felt like a language of its own. Every touch, every moan, every gasp coming together.

Being inside Will was agony and also a wondrous pleasure for Hannibal. He gripped his lover's body as he thrust deeper. Will's back arched, his head thrown back against the bed cover, and what a beautiful sight it was to Hannibal. His lovely David in the throes of ecstasy, moaning Hannibal's name over and over; as if he were chanting a mantra. Will in turn held on to Hannibal, his body on fire with every move. The passion between them so strong. Hannibal was panting and repeating Will's name between words of adoration and encouragement. "So beautiful...Will...I can't have enough of you...never...Will... Will..." Will's dick was now leaking continuously between them facilitating the friction of their bodies. Hannibal felt him constricting inside and knew that he was imminent now. Hannibal groaned from the back of his throat as he gave all he had to not let go now and hold it just a little more. The symbiosis was so perfect that they came together; Will screaming out Hannibal's name, and Hannibal shouting out Will's name in return, trembling against each other, in each other arms or perhaps as one two-headed mythological being. As their breathing slowed, Hannibal slowly pulled out of Will. He was about to move away to grab a washcloth when Will pulled him back. "No...stay...I...just hold me...we'll shower later..." And for once, Hannibal ignored his need to be clean and neat as he lay beside Will holding him. They fell asleep like this content and oblivious to the rest of the world.

APPROBATION DE LAFAMILLE

The melodic ring of the phone on Hannibal's bedside brought them back to this world. "Still not enough sleep ..." Will grumbled putting his pillow on his head and turning the other side. Hannibal as always smiled fondly at him before reaching for the phone "Allo?..." His brain switched right away when he heard her small voice in Japanese, short and direct sentences. He hung up, and jumped from the bed "Will, wake up! My aunt Murasaki is here. Please hurry up to the shower..." "What?! She is here?!" "Yes! Please move quickly." "What is it...a kind of inspection of our matrimonial situation..." Will smiled, amused to see the urgency of Hannibal whose unexpected reaction wasn't so different from that of a guilty teenager. Still grumbling he let Hannibal push him into the bathroom and close the door. Hannibal grabbed the hotel bathroom robe on the chair, put it on, ran a hand through his hair and went to the door of the suite. He opened the door and Aunt Murasaki entered their suite without a word. Her face was unreadable as always, but Hannibal knowing her well could still read she was amused. Even a little more when she entered the salon and saw the broken sofa. She didn't say anything of course and serenely sat in one of the armchairs while Hannibal took the one next to her "Sorry, we were still sleeping, last night we were quite busy..." "Yes, Hannibal. I can smell it." She smiled fondly looking at him. "Eh...yes, you do." Hannibal let himself to be unusually nervous from time to time around Murasaki in their private relationship to show her he still remembered the wild cub she saved years ago to sink in a violent and destructive reckoning.

Technically she was his mother since she adopted him when he was 16, but she was also his boss. In a ninja clan, it is a very serious matter. He was saved and trained and educated in their way, but he owed them some "services" from time to time. In counterpart, he had access to their unlimited resources and network being the son of one of the highest leader of the clan. Murasaki's father left a legend and his daughter built her own before falling in love with a funny Lithuanian aristocrat in Paris. She was feared enough to retain her status, but you cannot leave the clan...unless you are dead. In any way that thought surely never crossed her mind, despite the fragile appearance, she was ninja through and through. She would die without hesitation for her clan and kill much more easily. Now the smile completely disappeared and she was all business when she addresses Hannibal in Japanese "I hope that everything went to your satisfaction last night?" Hannibal saw it too but now he ought to be serious "I am happy to tell you that this warlord will never be an inconvenience for my uncle or you or anyone else anymore. Their nest in Paris was eradicated." He answered in Japanese. "Please convey my satisfaction to Jean as his preparatory work allowed our successful mission." Murasaki smiled, she was happy with Hannibal's behavior. He never forgot their way and knew how to punish and reward as he should. She put her hand on his arm tenderly, now she was his affections aunt again, and so he allowed himself to put his hand on her ineffective complicity. She was still so beautiful despite the years...

Unable to stay quiet for so long, Will showered hurriedly and then grabbed one of the hotel towels. Wrapping it around his hips, he came out of the bathroom just as Hannibal was attempting to explain something to his aunt. "Er...hi...good morning...." Will said, then he blushed steadily realizing his state of undress. "We were...just...I mean...I..." Hannibal quickly explained. "Will and I were about to shower..." Will almost laughed out loud, especially when he noticed Hannibal's embarrassed look. His lover kept his eyes on the floor, while he took in deep breaths. Looking up again, Hannibal said to his aunt "Would you like to join us..for lunch...before we leave for Florence?" There was silence then as if to say Murasaki was contemplating her answer. Then she looked Will in the eye and said, "Might I have a word with you, William.." "Please...it's Will...I don't.." "Oh yes, of course, Will.." Murasaki then glanced at the chair Hannibal was seated on. "You'd better shower, Hannibal" And that was enough to send Hannibal right to the bathroom. Will was rather surprised at that, but then Murasaki was the kind of lady you had to obey. He rubbed the back of his neck nervously. "Is this the part where you...kinda..tell me that if I hurt Hanni you'll...castrate me?" Murasaki's laugh sounded like the tinkling of tiny bells. "No, Will. Nothing of that sort", she said as she composed herself. "I do know that you will not hurt Hannibal. What I want to know is whether or not you intend to be with him till he breathes his last."

The statement caught Will off guard. "I..of course! I mean...I'm in this for the long haul. Hannibal's the one for me." Murasaki then leaned closer and took Will's right hand in hers. She turned his palm upwards and ran her fingertips across it. Will blinked then frowned. "Are you...this isn't some fortune telling joke, is it?" "Hannibal always had soft hands. Yes, even for a surgeon. He'd always been a little vain in his looks. He made sure he always looked neat, clean...that his skin was always moist and he kept his body fit." She then looked up again. "You, on the other hand, like to... 'rough it out' as they say. You too work with your hands...carpentry?" She enquired. Will shook his head. "Not really...I mean I do that sometimes but...mostly fixing boat engines...more mechanical stuff. My dad used to repair boats for a living." "Ah! Of course..." Murasaki then let go of Will's hand. "Hannibal..wasn't always good at taking care of himself." Will wondered if she meant that Hannibal was a reckless youth once. But somehow he sensed that there was something deeper in what she said. "Sometimes the need for revenge is so..tempting for him, that he forgets himself. This is why I'm asking you: do you intend to see this through... until the end of your days?" Will swallowed. "I love Hannibal. He's the only one..well, besides Beverly..my best friend...Hannibal understands me. He accepted me...everything about me, flaws and all. And I...I don't care about...I mean...you KNOW what he is...what he does..." Murasaki nodded slightly. Then Will continued. "No matter what happens, I'll never leave him." "You were with him last night...did you enjoy killing?"

Suddenly the room went very cold, Will realized that his answer could mean death or life. The delicate aunt Murasaki was now emanating lethal power, and he perceived it as clearly as the Eiffel tower through the balcony window. "No...Not really. I am not a killer, or more accurately I wish I was not a killer." "Your honesty is admirable Will, as the clarity of your mind. Please tell me then...what do you feel when you kill?" Will just stared at her, then he blurted out the first thing that came to his mind. "I feel powerful, I know that. But it is not

what you want to hear. You already know that, don't you?" "Yes, indeed." purred Murasaki. "Righteous. I felt...righteous....they deserved it." Will's breathing quickened a little. "They were.....they were PIGS!" Will ran shaking fingers through his damp curls. "I...it was like...I had the ultimate power to...to judge them...whether they lived or died. They deserved death. It was my right to...oh god! This is how Hanni feels, right?" Will's blue eyes were opened wide, but not in fear. It seemed as if he had a moment of revelation. "He sees them as pigs...not worthy of anything but to be slaughtered. They are...they are ugly, so he turns them into something beautiful. And...and the first time I saw it...saw Hanni's work...god, it was beautiful!" Murasaki's eyes widened a little too before she schooled her expression once again. *Truly, Hannibal has found his soulmate* she said to herself. "Yes, Hannibal's work is truly remarkable. Do you think you would like to leave a legend of your own Will?" Will flushed. He didn't know what to say; whatever answer it was, he only hoped it would not offend someone like Murasaki. "I...I just wish to partake...with Hannibal. To join him as one would join...their spouse...a bonding...like a marriage of opposites..I..."

He didn't get to finish his sentence, since Hannibal suddenly marched into the room, his hair dripping wet while his body covered with a bathrobe. He came to stand behind Will and put his hand on Will's bare shoulder. Protective and supportive "Perhaps you should get dressed, Will. I think you've sat there long enough in a towel" Hannibal teased his lover, who blushed even more. Murasaki watched her nephew and his lover share a loving glance before Will left in search of clothes. Then to Hannibal in Japanese again "I am happy for you, you've found your *Nakama* ." Hannibal smiled widely "Yes, I have." Hannibal also knew that she meant to tell him that Will was safe now. Hannibal didn't feel he needed her approval anyway. That part was also clear for Murasaki. Hannibal will never let himself be tamed even for his love for her, maybe Will will succeed where she failed...No one can underestimate the power of love.

About an hour or so later, Hannibal and Will were sated with Murasaki at their suite's terrace for lunch. Hannibal, of course, had ordered their meal in flawless French, to which made Will roll his eyes and mouth the words "show off". Hannibal winked while he confirmed the menu. "Someday, you're gonna have to teach me that sexy language.." "I thought you spoke French, Will...growing up where you did..." Will chuckled. "Yeah, but not like how YOU speak it." Murasaki cleared her throat. "Oh Will...when Hannibal first started French lessons, he was almost hopeless." Hannibal cringed. "Aunt..." Will laughed. "Well, at least now I know you weren't so perfect after all..." The waiter in the corner presented the bottle to Hannibal who nodded with appreciation, and then served him a little of the rosé wine bottle "Garrus from Château d'Esclans, Domaine Sacha Lichine, an excellent choice, Monsieur..." Hannibal smelt his glass and then tasted the wine before giving his approval. The waiter then poured wine in Murasaki's glass and Will's, before filling Hannibal's glass. Another waiter took the plates from the rolling table and placed them ceremoniously in front of them "Salade Provençale with balsamic vinegar, please enjoy your meal!" Murasaki gave a glance to Hannibal and he told the waiters to leave the rest on the dish warmers, and that they will serve themselves for the rest of the lunch. He dismissed them, and they left diligently.

“A small celebration, Hannibal?” Murasaki asked. She knew that some of the dishes Hannibal ordered were his favorite and that he only had them when there was a joyous occasion. “Yes, Aunt Murasaki. I...” Hannibal glanced at Will, who looked bewildered at the spread of food. “...I...want to celebrate Will...he is a rare gift to me.” And of course...Will blushed at once. Which made Hannibal and Murasaki exchange fond smiles with complicit understanding. Murasaki then raised her glass. “A toast...to celebrate Will then..” Hannibal raised his glass, while Will reluctantly raised his as well. After the toast, the three of them continued their meal. Hannibal then mentioned their plans to take the night train to Florence. “When we get back to America.. I...I intend to give up my surgery...” Will almost dropped his fork. “What? Hanni...” Hannibal touched Will’s wrist. “I wish to pursue psychiatry instead. Just a change of scene, my dear.” Hannibal didn’t wait for more reaction, his decision was his and already made. He got up and got busy to bring their next plates. “Escalope de veau à la crème avec gratin de pomme de terre” he smiled at the mocking expression that Will gave him for showing off his French cuisine expertise. Murasaki asked some questions about Will’s work at the FBI and wanted to comprehend more specifically his enrollment in investigating Hannibal’s murders.

She was a little baffled by the audacity they both showed in the matter. Hannibal told her that they wanted to play mouse and cat as long as it was possible as Will and he enjoyed their work and their life here in Baltimore. Knowing that at one point, they will want something else, and walk the vast world together. Murasaki understood too well what it was to fight to keep a quiet life with the one you love. Nevertheless, she also had the responsibility as a leader. “As long as you remember your loyalty toward our clan, we will always assist you in your projects. Now I will endorse Will as your life companion, but you know that he will still be seen as your responsibility by the others.” Will didn’t understand exactly what was going on and knew that they didn’t tell him everything. Who were the mysterious others? What did she mean? But he also sensed that now was not the time. Hannibal put his hand on his to give him his assurance, that he will answer any question he has but not now. “I don’t ask for approval, neither does Will.” said Hannibal. Murasaki and Hannibal exchanged a hard gaze. “You should not have doubt about my loyalty to you, however. I have proved it more than once, and I shall continue to do so in the future. Will could even prove himself valuable as he did last night in that prospect.” Everyone breathed again. They ate in silence for a few minutes. And then Murasaki smiled gently to Will “Don’t let our family awkwardness affect you, Will. I am sure that Hannibal will explain it more fully to you. Know that Uncle Robert and I are truly happy that Hannibal and you found each other. Maybe you could visit us while we stay in Japan?”

Will was startled by the invitation. “Wow! Er...yeah..sure....I’ve never been to Japan.” Murasaki had a twinkle in her eye when she turned to Hannibal and said, “Then you must remedy this, Hannibal. Bring your Nakama to meet us soon.” Hannibal sighed with content “Aunt, you are a true master.” He got up and kissed her on the temple before going for the desserts from the rolling table. “Crème brûlée avec sauce caramel.” The rest of their lunch was

pleasant and Murasaki made Will laugh with more anecdotes on Hannibal's first trip in Japan when he was still a wild teenager, in "great need of discipline and self-control". Will saw the love between them both behind the not so subtle veil of threat of the secret kept from him. But he understood that Hannibal would share it all with him when he was ready to accept it. *I wonder if I should learn Japanese instead of French* Will wondered to himself. The three of them continued to talk. A little after 2 pm Murasaki glanced at her jeweled watch. "Oh...I believe I need to leave you both to pack. I myself have some errands to run in town before I head back to your uncle, Hannibal. Will it was such a pleasure to get to know you." Will rose from the table. Not knowing much about Japanese customs, he took Murasaki's hand and kissed her knuckles. "It was good to meet you too. Oh, and thanks for all those embarrassing stories about Hannibal!" Hannibal excused himself and Will accompanied her to the door where Hannibal brought her the bag that Jean have given them, now fully packed with both their clothes and shoes, the now bloody clothing from last night. Murasaki took it without a word and kissed them both on the cheeks before she left.

L'AVENTURE CONTINUE

When Hannibal closed the door behind her, he extended his hand to grab Will by the neck and drew him closer to kiss his forehead. "She loves you, Will. She felt how much you mean to me and she saw you." Will smiled. "Yeah, I'm glad...don't want to end up sushi on her dish." Hannibal rolled his eyes, playfully nipped Will's lower lip. "Cheeky...so very naughty...." He continued to kiss Will's neck and throat. The bruises on Will's throat was more visible now. "I'm still angry about what that pig did to you...how he marred your skin, you didn't deserve it.." Will kissed Hannibal back. "I told you...I will take anything and everything this life throws at me...if only so I can spend it with you." The words made Hannibal shudder. It sounded almost like a marital vow from Will. Taking a deep breath, he began to unbutton Will's shirt. "Hanni? Seriously? Right here...at the door?" Hannibal chuckled. "I wish to give you a message, Will. Do get your mind out of the gutter.." Will leaned back against the door, groaning. "Every time you touch me, I feel dirty." For that comment, Hannibal playfully smacked Will's bottom.

Minutes later, Will found himself lying face down on towels on the bed. He'd been stripped right down to his briefs while Hannibal prepared the oils. He then climbed onto the bed and straddled Will. Rubbing the scented oils on his palms, he began with Will's shoulders and neck. "Hmm....surgeon hands..." "Hush...just relax...empty your mind." Will sighed deeply. Hannibal kneaded Will's muscles, putting a bit more pressure on where the muscles seemed tense and stiff. If Will were a cat, he would have been purring with pleasure. Hannibal then moved down his lover's back, mindful of the spine. "This..is....wonderful..." Will sounded like he would doze off at any moment. Hannibal didn't mind. He knew that Will was exhausted after their hunt. His David had never been on such a rigorous excursion before. It was Will's first kill together with Hannibal. ** And...I almost lost my Beloved...that swine was choking him...* * Hannibal's hands paused as he tried to control his own breathing. The very thought of Will almost having his life choked out of him made Hannibal fume. "Hanni?" Will's sleepy voice was followed by a yawn. Hannibal leaned over, kissing Will on the cheek just below his blue eyes. "You may sleep, darling....you need to rest." Once Hannibal was done with the massage, he carefully climbed out of bed. Will was lost in a deep sleep. Hannibal washed his hands, dried them, then he too lay on the bed next to Will. Eventually, he dozed off.

After their nap, it was time to pack. Of course, Hannibal insisted that he folded his suits "the right way" and made him do it three times until he was satisfied. Will grumbled just to play his part of a grouchy teenager when Hannibal was in mentor mode. Love overflowed everywhere, in the looks, in the gestures, in the most furtive contacts. Will was happy, and that terrified him at the realization ***, *Of course, a catastrophe will necessarily happen and take everything with it ... unless Hannibal is strong enough for them both...He is, I know he is.* * Will looked at Hannibal slowly and met his eyes ** Love and adoration...God, let me have this, let me have Hannibal!* * Hannibal felt that Will froze and gave him his full attention as

he saw how overwhelmed he was by emotion “Will? What are you thinking right now? Stay with me here, Beloved...” Hannibal softly stroked his cheek and Will leaned against his hand, coming back to here, now and life “Promise me, Hannibal...Promise me to stay with me whatever happens, promise me you’ll never get bored, promise me!” Will’s voice was strangled by emotion. Hannibal understood what was at play in the arena of Will’s skull “Will, you don’t need to play with imaginary shadows or disaster to allow yourself to appreciate what we have. From the moment I saw you, I knew that this happiness was our fate. It gave me a reason to change my life, and now my career. Have no doubt that death will claim us together. I want to live with you, and I want to die with you...” with a little smile to alleviate the seriousness of his words Hannibal added, “...as late as possible, if you will, however.” Hannibal took Will in his arms and grounded him in his warmth and the solidity of his love.

When the luggage was ready, Hannibal called the reception and a porter came to take them downstairs. A rigid little man came to meet them in the lobby after they checked out “Doctor Lecter, it was a pleasure to have you here again. I hope you enjoyed your stay with us.” Hannibal shook his hand “Mr. Delongchamps, it was a pleasure, yes. My family is happy with your management. I am afraid however that in our enthusiasm, my friend and I broke one of the couches...” Will almost instantly combusted with laughter when he heard Hannibal, and he blushed red to the very point of his adorable ears. To his credit, the manager didn’t show any embarrassment “It’s nothing, Dr Lecter. Do not worry yourself for that...” “Oh, I won’t...” “I wish you a good trip, then, and hope we will have the pleasure to see you soon again” the manager finished his tirade while he closed the door of the limousine. Once the car began to move, Will burst into laughter. “He...he didn’t even....oh god! He didn’t even blink when you mentioned the broken couch!...or how we broke it...” Hannibal smirked. “I told you, dearest...it was nothing to worry about. Do you think this seat is more solid...” “Hannibal! We’re....we’re not...” Will looked around, noticed that the driver had the panel closed. “Do you..seriously want to have it out in the car?” He whispered to Hannibal. Hannibal’s answer was a mysterious smile. “Hmm....”

They just had time for a soft and languorous kiss before the train station, but they both worked themselves in a state of hardness that didn’t help them when they got out of the car. “Ok, this takes the cake. Making out in the back seat of a limo!” Will laughed as Hannibal led him out. Hannibal shifted, his hardness making him uncomfortable. “I suppose this is something you can brag about to Ms. Katz.” Will leaned into Hannibal as they walked hand in hand towards the platform. “Yeah....she already hates me for staying at the gorgeous suite. May as well brag about the limo too.” Hannibal laughed genuinely, he felt so good and alive to have Will with him. He took his hand while they entered the Lyon station. The crowd of tourists and commuters was compact at this hour, but Hannibal’s presence was always a force strong enough to split the crowd and open them a passage to the electronic signboard. Their Thello TGV was at 7:23 pm at Hall 1; they will arrive in Milano at 5:00 am the next day and then an hour and a half later they’ll be in Firenze. They were a little early but went to Hall 1 nonetheless. Will was dreaming with a little smile on his lips. He felt like he and Hannibal were in a bubble separate from the rest of the world. Normally the people around them would

have agitated Will, due to his empathy, but they now seemed like a theatrical decor for his adventurous life with Hannibal. * *Even my nightmares have lessened. Hanni must be magic!*
* Will chuckled to himself. The train had already arrived and they were able to board right away. Hannibal led Will first, guiding him to their private compartment. And then joyfully push him in and closed the door “I have all night to make love to you in Italian, my beautiful David...”

Will moaned as Hannibal mouthed his way along his throat. He clawed at Hannibal’s shoulders. “Get...this stupid...jacket...off...” Hannibal pulled back a little, quickly removing his jacket and tie. Then he grabbed Will’s arms and pinned them back. “I...am going...to take my time...unwrapping this...beautiful gift...before me...” Hannibal said, deliberately speaking in Italian. Will moaned louder, his breathing harsh. Hannibal continued, “Il mio bellissimo David torna a casa.” Will could barely stand as the clothes were slowly peeled off his body. “You...you....god, Hanni....you keep saying those things...I’m...I’m gonna cum right now...” “Then I will make you hard again...I will savor you all night. It is a dream come true for me. You, my beautiful David in Firenze.” Will gasped when he felt a tongue circle his exposed nipples. Hannibal kept torturing his lover with wet kisses, sucking at the pale skin, tasting Will. He then teasingly unbuckled Will’s belt and pulled down the zip of pants. Will’s head jerked back as cool fingers slipped into his briefs. “Ha...Ha....Hanni.....urgh!” More Italian words were whispered into Will’s ear. Will didn’t need to understand the words to know the love and the lust in Hannibal’s voice. They were both on fire. The slow stripping had stretched his own lust tout like a spring. He was almost shaking with immense desire, wanting Hannibal to just stop the torture.

“P..please.....Ha...Ha.....” Will’s words were swallowed by Hannibal’s mouth. More Italian phrases escaped Hannibal’s lips while he removed Will’s pants and briefs. While Hannibal was kissing and sucking marks on his skin, Will lost his shoes. Eventually, both the lovers landed on the berth. Will lay back bouncing a little, laughing to himself. As he lay back, he looked up to find Hannibal vigorously undressing. “Hurry up, old man!” Hannibal, finally naked, grabbed one of Will’s legs. He slowly pulled out the dull grey sock and planted kisses on Will’s ankle bones. When Will moaned and squirmed Hannibal chuckled, “This...old man...is going to show you a thing or two...little puppy.” The berth was hardly large enough to contain Hannibal’s solid body, and like this, above him, it could have been claustrophobic, but Will felt good to physically see his universe only consistent of Hannibal. Like for once his mind and body live on the same plan. He felt secure and confident, delighted to see that Hannibal lost a little of his composure when he was so in hurry to get undressed to join him. He openly laughed and that sounded like the crystal sound of a river flow, enchanting. But the thirst was already too strong for both of them, and very soon there was only moaning, and panting interspersed with Italian words. Will took Hannibal’s cock in his hand and stroked him gently, just to exercise his power and tame his beast. The deep-throated roar that he got in return for his teasing was rewarding enough. Hannibal hardly breathed when his ministration went tighter.

Hannibal's large hand came on top of his and stopped it "Let...me, Will". Hannibal pushed his hand away on his own cock and took them both in his large hand again. That was hot, not only to feel the friction but to see how lost Hannibal was in lust. They both moaned and panted heavily while Hannibal worked them until they came together. Hannibal rested his forehead on Will's shoulder while he tried to calm his rapid breathing. Will in turn gingerly ran his fingers through the damp hair on the back of Hannibal's head. "Wow!" "Wow indeed, Dearest...but this is just the opening act." Will chuckled. "Oh? I see...I suppose the...orchestra was just warming up before the opera...god! This is..." Will laughed harder now, still panting from the handjob he received. "I can't believe we just....we....on the train...." Hannibal kissed Will's chest. "Now that the train has left the station, I shall prepare for the...main act." Hannibal slowly moved away, walking up to his hand luggage in the corner. "Organic lube?" Will asked, noticing the small bottle Hannibal pulled out. He couldn't read the label from where he lay, but he knew Hannibal was rather particular about such things. "Where did you even find the time to buy it anyway?" Will slowly rose, balancing his weight on his elbows. Hannibal came and knelt between his thighs which meant that one of Will's legs was now hanging out of the berth to give him some space. Hannibal opened the small lube bottle and put a good quantity on his fingers. Will was watching the show with a little smile. Hannibal warmed the thick gel between his fingers while looking into Will's eyes "I am very careful with what I put in your body as well, so yes organic. Nothing too good for you. Let's see if you like it..." Hannibal bent over Will and drew his bending leg over his shoulder while his mouth found his natural way on Will's.

Will relaxed, feeling how gentle his lover was, with the two fingers circling his tight entrance. He liked the soft sliding sensation of the gel accompanying the hot desire coiling in his belly. The contrast gave both more force in his sensations. Hannibal whispered some praises in Italian at the corner of Will's mouth, only to hear his beloved moan when he pushed his finger through the relaxed muscle there. "...I have no idea...what you just said...but...I don't....don't care.....Hannibal...please..just fuck me" Will pleaded earnestly. "Patience, my sweet boy. Let me get you slowly to the steps of our mutual pleasure" Will's body jerked as Hannibal began to move. "Don't hold back those lovely sounds you make....* *lascia che io ti ami**, Will..." Will's right hand immediately latched onto Hannibal's broad shoulder, clutching hard, clawing with every thrust. His left hand grabbing the sheets on the bed, holding on for dear life. Hannibal's mouth came on Will's mouth again with force and pushed him back onto the mattress. The frenzy was something that they both compete on, a playful game of power between their inner beasts. Will, playing bottom, was paradoxically a position of power to play on Hannibal's lust. Pushing on his hand to impale himself deeper and moan until Hannibal couldn't resist anymore. This was fun to see him trying to resist...and succumb every time to his call. For now, Hannibal was still on his game, pushing a second finger in his David's hot hole. Will was painfully hard again, and the friction of their erect cocks against their bellies enclosing them made difficult to resist. "More....please.....Hanni.....please" The words choked out of Will's throat.

Will realized that soon he'd have a rather hoarse voice, but he didn't care. The pleasure he received from such a carnal act with Hannibal was worth it. He didn't have that many lovers

in the past, but after Hannibal, he wouldn't ever be in want of anyone else. Will also knew without a doubt that Hannibal was not one who shared what was his. For now, his thoughts shut down, all lost in his burning pleasure. Hannibal became even more tender when he moved closer to deposit little kisses on Will's shoulder while watching him from the corner. He noticed his lover's grin, mixed with pleasure and pain, while he pushed a third finger. The coordinated movements between Will's hips and Hannibal's hand was unbalanced as soon as his fingers came to brush his prostate. Will's body jerked, his back arching from the berth against Hannibal's belly and cock. Will closed his eyes with the sting of the pleasure and when he opened them, he saw such adoration and devotion in Hannibal's lidded eyes that he almost lost it and came "Hanni...I can't wait!...Want you now!..." Hannibal woke up from his trance and bent to deposit a reverent kiss on Will's mouth while he removed his fingers. His cock throbbed against his lower belly while he knelt between Will's legs to position himself against Will's relaxed entrance. Will was a feast and Hannibal intended to take all his time to savor it like always. He could never have enough of Will, in lovemaking or in any other way. Hannibal craved Will like a drug.

He slid with comfort into the tight heat of Will's body. "Ha...n...." Will couldn't find his voice, he too desperate for more, craving just as much as Hannibal was. "My Beloved...my..life....." Hannibal began to thrust deeper. Both the men rocked slowly, moaning and gasping. Hannibal throwing out Italian phrases while Will made incoherent sounds. The berth screeched with every movement. As the train rushed down the tracks, Will lay back in the berth clinging to his older lover. Hannibal kept pounding into his beloved, his ears filled with the sacred music of their shared desire. Before Hannibal, Will would have abhorred the thought of passengers copulating to loudly on a train. But now, he was proud to show the world that he was completely in love with Hannibal. He didn't care about Hannibal's nature, as it was his nature as well now that he realized it and felt comfortable with his powerful dark facet. Killing with Hannibal in Paris, among the half revelation of Hannibal's family secret and dangerous world, was a beautiful experience. It felt good, it felt powerful. "Stay...with me....Will...." Hannibal panted, as he saw Will's thoughts temporary drift. "I'm....here.....god, Hanni....don't....please....I need....more..." Will keened, he breathless with need. A loud roar escaped Hannibal's chest, as he thrust with a renewed energy, pounding his beloved into the mattress to obey his request. "Don't...hold back....scream as...loud as..." Will squeezed Hannibal's shoulder, nails digging into the skin, and then he came screaming Hannibal's name as loud as he could. Hannibal followed soon almost howling like a wild beast in battle.

As Hannibal collapsed onto his lover's chest, Will slowly lifted his hand while running his fingers through Hannibal's hair. "We....I....the berth's still in one piece..." A low deep chuckle sounded from Hannibal. "Yes...this berth is more sturdy than the hotel's couch." Will too laughed. "Fucking on the train. That's....one off the List." Hannibal slowly pushed himself up and kissed Will's nose. "Not fucking....we made love, Will. Ours is not something so base and primal." Will stroked his lover's cheek. "You find the art in everything, don't you?" Hannibal gave him a little smile mostly with his eyes "And what about your List? Maybe you could share it with me and we could work through it" Will smiled brightly

“Always the gentleman, Hannibal...” Instantly, something dark crossed in Hannibal’s eyes, just a flicker “Only for you, Beloved! You don’t know how happy I am to finally have my beautiful David in Florence. A dream come true.” Will then explained to Hannibal how he and Beverly had once come up with a random list of things to do before they died. “We were both kinda drunk...it was after a bad case...and, I dunno...we just started listing stuff down. One of it was * *Fucking on a train* *...then there was something like * *Making out in the backseat of a limo back while the driver looks away* *, and of course * *jerking off while on a plane* * ...”

Hannibal frowned a little. “How drunk were you both?” Will laughed again. “Very! God, Hanni...we just....we wrote all the stuff down. I think there were like...close to forty items. But I don’t know who saved it. Maybe Bev has it. She might blackmail me with it someday.” Hannibal kissed Will. “I should talk to Ms. Katz, maybe add some of my own to the list.” “Hanni!” They both laughed heartily, genuine happiness, no second thought, no secret, no agenda. Will look at Hannibal fondly, he wanted his beast to laugh more, to be happy, and most of all he wanted to find a way that Hannibal felt secure in their relationship. He was aware of Hannibal’s nightmares; sometimes he cried in his sleep. There was always an aura of darkness surrounding Hannibal, even when he laughed like now. Will felt it and his heart was melting in empathy for the child yelling alone deep down in Hannibal. A cry that never received a response, a cry that he alone could hear. And because of his empathy, Will wanted too much to comfort the child within Hannibal. He knew what it was like to be different. Will’s father always moved around depending on his work and Will was always the new boy in the town and in the schools too. He himself carry a cry of his own. An unknown mother who left them, an alcoholic and depressed father who could never be pleased with his son, as he saw in the boy a reflection of his lost wife.

Will tenderly extended his hand to Hannibal's hair and stroked it gently. “Hanni...wanna clean up a little? I...I just want to hold you while we sleep.” Hannibal gazed into his lover’s azure eyes. “My dear, you don’t need my permission to hold me.” They moved together to the small rudimentary bathroom. Hannibal wet a little towel and handed it to Will to clean himself as best as he could without a proper shower. Then he turned, looked at the mess they left on the lower berth “I believe it will be better if we both slept on the upper berth, we left quite a mess for the cleaning team.” Hannibal smiled “And I am very happy we did!” Will climbed the ladder to the upper berth, Hannibal following after. They laid side by side, holding each other. The train rocked them and they quickly fell asleep in each other's arms. Peaceful and warm were the dreams of Will, as he watched the stag in the glades, bending over the stream to drink. Will felt his visceral and unquenchable thirst as well. His thirst was only known to him since he met Hannibal. The wendigo roaming in his nightmares was not only giving death but life. Love was now flowing through his veins, like an indispensable source of life. He saw the wendigo coming in the glade and the stag watched him, unafraid, even rejoicing. When their gazes met it was serene. The reconnaissance of each other with benevolence and acceptance. That serenity was shared by Will as well.

Dolce vita

The early light reached them on the upper bed and Will woke up, squeezed between the partition against his back and Hannibal's warm body. The morning hardness he felt against his thighs was not to be dismissed as it was impossible to ignore, between the train's repetitive movements and the softness of Hannibal's cock against his. He tried to stay immobile to avoid more friction and to risk waking up Hannibal. Two grown men on a small berth was not the ideal situation for that. Hannibal tentatively moved in his sleep. Will breathed deeply, hastily biting his hand to stay silent. Every slight move from Hannibal caused his soft cock to brush against Will's sensitive skin. At the same time, Will wanted so much to lean back and encourage more contact. He then felt Hannibal's arms around his body, pulling him closer. More friction and Will could only moan in reply. Hannibal smiled before he opened his eyes and gaze at Will mockingly "Good morning, Beloved. I like to wake up with you so hard for me. Do you require any assistance?" Will ground against him wildly. "Yes, unless I use you as a sex toy and masturbate against you..." Hannibal jumps on top of Will "Oh, no! I don't think so, impudent boy!" Will chuckled while he was pinned against the thin mattress of the berth. "Come on, Ripper...do you worst!" Hannibal narrowed his eyes at Will's comment and proceeded to attack Will's mouth. He kissed Will hard as if sucking out the life from his lover.

Will felt as Hannibal's cock got more demanding against his until grinding was not enough for both of them. Will drew his legs up and Hannibal positioned himself against his entrance while supporting his weight on his forearms. He didn't move though "Will, are you sure?" Will panted and he had to breathe before his answer "Yes, I'm sure... I'm still... I still feel wet from last night... can't wait, please!" Hannibal pushed into Will's warmth slowly, still unsure and didn't want to hurt Will. His pre-cum wasn't enough to smoothen the tight muscle guarding Will's entrance and he was still sensitive from their last love-making. It was a mixture of pleasure and pain, and he was sure that it was the same for Will. He felt him under him, around him, bathing in the scent of their mixed fluids, and moaning together, he was still human, he pushed a little harder and stopped to leave enough time for Will to adapt. Will was on fire against him, moaning and encouraging him, almost too much for his self-control. When he felt the tightness relaxed against his length inside Will, he became to move again, a slow roll of his hips. "More...move!" Will screamed. Hannibal looked at Will, unsure. He didn't breathe as the lust in Will's eyes stole his next heartbeat. Hannibal obeyed, Will was not to be ignored when he was so needy and desperate for more. "I...I want you....please....Hanni..." Will's need tore through Hannibal, making him thrust deeper. "Anything....everything....all for you..." Hannibal panted, as he and Will rocked together in the berth, until they came together, shaking and screaming each other's names. They stayed immobile, glued to each other for long enough to catch their breath. They felt drowsy and eventually dozed off while the eternal gates of time opened once again for them. Time stood still, this is what true love granted them. A point in time where they can always find themselves back in their mind, a point engraved in the very nature of their DNA from now on. Something akin to a trauma, but with more promise for life.

The train began to slow down and almost instantly Hannibal woke up. Before Will could say anything, Hannibal answered, "We must be at Bergamo already. The border agents will board

the train for our passports.” He hastily got up, climbed down the ladder and reached for his underwear on the floor. Watching Will lazily displaying himself naked Hannibal said, “You’d better cover yourself, I don’t want to have to kill two carabinieri because they enjoyed looking at your beautiful body when they come.” Will grinned. “Hanni doesn’t want to share?” Hannibal rolled his eyes. “Hanni NEVER shares what belongs to him. And since YOU are not that clear on this concept...” Hannibal moved towards Will, tossing his clothes at him, “...I will have to convince you yet again later.” “Once we get to Florence?” Hannibal nodded. “Yes. Perhaps this cheeky little puppy needs some discipline.” Will frowned but his voice said otherwise “How dare you threaten your beautiful David? Am I not the lost treasure, the gifted child, coming back to his lost town to be revered by all?” Hannibal openly laughed seeing Will throwing his head back mockingly, especially when mentioning his revered nickname. “What a gifted child indeed! Yes, my Dearest...you are indeed gifted in theatrics!” Will pouted. “You just called me a *drama queen* didn’t you?”

Just as Hannibal finished tucking his shirt into his pants, someone knocked to the door of their compartment, “Passaporti, per favore!” (Passports, please!) a voice called out. Hannibal went to the door and opened it while Will hastily retreated under the sheet. “Ciao signori, i vostri passaporti per favore.” (Hello gentlemen, your passports please). The two border agents entered their compartment following Hannibal who was now kneeling at one of their bags to retrieve their passports. With the scent of their previous love-making in the air and the state of Hannibal’s attire, it was difficult for them to ignore what just happened before their arrival. The agents were used to this kind of situation; Italy, as the number one destination for lovers in quest of dolce vita. “Festeggiando la tua luna di miele, signore?” (Celebrating your honeymoon, sir?) The agent couldn’t help but ask with a smile. Hannibal grinned. “Sì, il mio amante è piuttosto timido. Per favore scusalo.” (Yes, my lover is rather shy. Please excuse him). One of the men chuckled while the other checked Hannibal and Will’s passports. He discreetly pushed his colleague's elbow to show him both passports. They looked at each other mockingly. Hannibal ignored them. In other circumstances, he would have repainted the compartment in red, but he preferred to stay in the euphoria of his shared ecstasy with Will. “È tutto a posto, signore” (Everything is in order, Sir). “Grazie mille” (thank you very much), Hannibal said, as he led the agents out and closed the door. When he turned around to face the berth, Will peaked out from under the sheets. “Why do you always sound so hot speaking in a foreign language?”

Hannibal climbed the ladder and left the ugliness of the world behind. Will made some room for him as he leaned against him on the berth. Hannibal nosed Will’s throat and whispered: “Should I take umbrage or is it a challenge?” Will chuckled. “You start cozying up to me like this, we might never get off the train.” They exchanged small kisses slowly with infinite tenderness to each other’s throats, jaw, chin, and cheeks, until Will felt his eyes close by themselves, claimed by sleep. The last picture imprinted in his eyes was a blond worker leaned against an electric pillar between the rails. He was nonchalantly smoking and the early sun was behind him like in a Renaissance painting to light a sacred scene. His hair curls made him look like a cherub. It was a beautiful scene and totally incongruent. Will wondered already half asleep if it was how Hannibal saw him, a beautiful David in the Baltimore Renaissance Harborplace hotel ballroom. He smiled, falling asleep, bathed in Hannibal’s warmth, dreaming of them walking on the very romantic Ponte Vecchio over the Arno. Hannibal did not miss the smile on Will’s face as he fell asleep, and the sight squeezed his heart. He felt overwhelmed by beauty and love. He had thought that love would definitely be

a strange concept for him. He had even felt contempt for it, just a play of one's hormones; an attraction caused by the release of pheromones.

Now he knew better. He thought of his past when he felt life was just passing him by. He knew that one day his end would come, as he sought revenge for Mischa's death. But now, after meeting Will Graham, Hannibal longed to spend the rest of his days with this David incarnate. Love was what made the difference, as the tragedy was not to die but to have wasted your life without knowing love. If ever Hannibal had to live his life all over again, he would wish to have met Will sooner; if only to have more years together. Hannibal didn't remember falling asleep, but when his internal clock wakes up he realizes that the train would be arriving in Milan soon. He glanced at the wall clock and noticed that it was a little after 5 am. "Will? Will, wake up." He gently shook his lover. Will groaned. "It can't be morning yet.." Will grumbled. "We'll be in Milano soon. Then we need to change trains.

And...although I much admire the view, I wouldn't want anyone seeing you wander around naked..." Will sealed Hannibal's mouth with his own. "Right, Hannibal Lecter doesn't share. Got it!" Will stretched as Hannibal began to climb down the ladder of the bunk. He followed his lover soon after and began searching around for his clothes. They dressed in silence, trying their best to look presentable. Once the train began to slow down, Will and Hannibal gathered their bags and left. Will felt the change right away in the people around. A mixture of Mediterranean tempers, the arrogance of a millennium old civilization, and thrive to live life fully. All summarized under the mysterious label of "Dolce Vita". Already, it was Italy, and, next stop would be Florence. Will knew without a doubt that he would easily adapt to that concept. The David in him felt at home. Serenity.

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